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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[THE SYMMETRICAL HAND CLOSED, IN A STRONG, FIERCE GRASP, UPON THE BUNDLE OF LETTERS.]

THE BROWN LADY.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Linda awoke the next morning and looked round the strange room, she had to pinch her arm severely to make herself aware that she was not still asleep and dreaming. This luxurious apartment, with its soft Persian carpet, heavy velvet curtains, carved furniture and fine paintings, was a bed-room—the Brown Lady's own bower—and the Brown Lady was no dreadful visitant from another world, but her own aunt—her grand-aunt, Eleanor! And where was she? Her bed was empty!

As Linda sat up and stared about her, one of the dwarfs entered, carrying a gown over her arm—a heavy weight under which she staggered—and said, in her little squeaky voice,—

"My lady sent you this, miss, this dress. It's one of hers, and may make shift to fit you, your own dress being very thin, and all

stained with damp, and torn. Shall I help you to dress, miss?"

"No, thank you," said the girl, staring at the queer little figure that was not much higher than her knee! Of what possible assistance could this human doll be to anyone's toilette?

"I can do your hair," said the dwarf rather imperiously, "just as well as the best hair-dresser that ever was born! You try and see if I can't!"

But this offer was also declined, and saying "your bath is laid out in the dressing room, and breakfast will be ready in half-an-hour," Minna withdrew with rather a lofty air.

Breakfast was a most dainty repast, laid out on a round table before a roaring fire, in front of which the black cat sat and blinked stolidly at the blaze. The Brown Lady was muffled up as usual, and seemed much less disposed for conversation than the previous night.

"The fact is, my dear," she explained, "you must not mind my silence. I am not used to hearing the sound of my own voice, and just at this very moment my mind is greatly occupied!"

Linda looked up at her interrogatively, and she added,—

"Yes; and about you! You must remain here, hidden quietly for a time until my poor brother-in-law's murderer is tracked down, and until I make Isaac Holroyd disgorge the proofs he holds of your identity. You won't find the time very long, I hope. I have plenty of books, and I know you are fond of reading."

"Does not the time seem very long to you sometimes?" asked the girl, "having no companion, no one to talk to but the two dwarfs?"

"Strange as you may think it, it does not. Rheuben, the cat, is my companion. I am used to this life now, and sometimes the days seem far too short."

Linda stared at her with a puzzled expression.

"Yes, you may well look surprised; but what I say is perfectly true! Besides my books and a constant supply of all the best literature of the day, I have a dear friend—my pen. I write, and find it a never-failing and ever-absorbing recreation."

"Letters, do you mean?"

"No, no, child! books. Come with me and see my study and library," crossing the room and opening a door as she spoke. Linda followed her into a small round room, lighted by three windows—a sunny cheerful apartment, in a turret, evidently, and looking out upon an unfrequented portion of the pleasure grounds.

"A charming place, indeed!" she remarked, looking about her, and then out of the window. "But I wonder you have never been found out, that no one has noticed this tower room?"

"There is no one to notice or search. There is something in that, you see; and I paid a handsome price to your grandfather for my little suite of secret chambers. My quarterly cheque went a long way towards keeping up the place. He was fond of money. Well, we have all our weaknesses, and he took precautions for my privacy long ago, knowing that if I were disturbed I would go away."

"And what do you write? What kind of books?" said the girl, glancing rather eagerly at the wall-appointed writing-table.

"I am known to the world as Richard Homrigh."

"What?" interrupted her niece. "And have you written those delightful novels, 'Moonlight Hall' and 'The Ice Maiden' that I have been reading lately to Mr. Holroyd?"

The Brown Lady nodded. "He was charmed with them; and I myself could not wait to finish them alone. I took them off and sat up late at night dictating them! I read them twice!"

"I am glad they pleased you, my dear!" "Pleased everyone! Did you not read the splendid notice in the *Saturday Review*, and another in the *Times*? That was what made Mr. Holroyd, I mean my grandfather, send for them."

"Yes, I read them; and those appreciative notices are some of my pleasure."

"Where do you get all your ideas? The stories are life itself!"

"I see, and have seen, a great deal more of life than you imagine, my child. I read too."

"But—"

"But that is not everything, you would say. Well, I suppose, as a compensation for other things, I have been gifted with some genius."

"Genius! I should think so! And is not that better than any other gift?" said the girl, enthusiastically.

"No!" said the Brown Lady, with a heavy sigh. "No, not in my opinion. And now I will leave you with a good novel, a good fire, and the cat for company, for I have a great deal to do on your behalf to-day."

"What have you to do?"

"Well, to settle up a bed-room for you for one thing, to make inquiries about the dark deed that has been done, for another, to write important letters for a third."

It was well a bed-room was got ready for Linda, for she occupied it incessantly for nearly six weeks.

The intense cold and damp, and the long starvation she had endured in the vault-like kitchen, threw her into a kind of rheumatic fever, which made her feel as if all her bones were being tightly stretched upon a rack.

Through this fever she was nursed with unremitting assiduity by her aunt and the two dwarfs; and by the time she was convalescent she and Reuben were on the best of terms, and he had quite adopted her into the family.

Outside her hiding-place the great hue-and-cry after her was gradually abating.

By the time that Linda was convalescent, and sitting up at the fire in a priceless sable cloak belonging to her grand-aunt, that energetic but mysterious lady thought it was time once more to take an active interest in her niece's worldly affairs.

Isaac Holroyd must be awake from his dream of false security.

Both his son and Isaac, being nearest at

hand, she proceeded to rouse him up without further delay in the following effectual manner.

Isaac had never been in the secret of the Brown Lady, and had always turned a deaf ear to all tales of her appearance, of the agonising effect she had had on various unfortunate people. He did not believe in her at all—no, not even if he saw her, he was bold enough to say.

One evening he happened to be alone—Gordon, as we know, seldom favoured him with his company. Two much-impressed clients and guests had just left. He had made an excellent dinner, had decanted the best part of a bottle of famous old port into his long, lean person, and felt on the best possible terms with himself—ay, and all mankind. How soon are the dead forgotten! He had only occupied his brother's place for seven little weeks, and he positively felt as if he had been established in it seven years.

He sat in his own especial sanctum—a room that he had especially selected as having a southern aspect—no draughts whatever, and above all, no gloomy memories. He sat in an arm chair with his back to the fire, facing a large, roomy writing-table, and proceeded to indulge in a rather favourite composition—that of drawing out and looking over bonds and banking accounts, at some lying in his own name—and besides all these, he looked over a certain packet of old letters.

These letters had a queer fascination for him. This was by no means the first time he handled them and turned them over—though he did not often read them—but they had a curious fascination for him. He liked to take them out and hold them in his hand. He toyed with them as he would have done with some dangerous weapon. If he had been a prudent man he would have destroyed these yellow-faded epistles twenty years previously, but they still existed. He had a curious superstitious feeling about them, and this odd, inexplicable superstition withheld his hand from the flames.

They were letters he had intercepted from his niece to her father; these were circulating letters from Miss Moe to himself, acknowledging payment for the child. What odd, mad, nest-pottered him to keep all these proofs? Who can say? Some people's actions are unaccountable to themselves, much less to their neighbours.

Isaac looked through the packet slowly, then laid it down, and pushed it somewhat impatiently from him, and sank into thought.

Where was the girl? Why had she done it?—meaning the murder. Had the old man's gibing tongue exasperated her to frenzy? Had she been beside herself with passion and on coming to her senses fled in horror from the scene of her crime? But the bonds, the notes, the diamonds, what of them? Little guessing that all these matters were safely concealed in his son's London lodgings, and that he was only biding his time to turn the diamonds, at any rate, into coin of the realm.

"Old Daeges and young Daeges believe she has been made away with, and Thomas Carlton talks of detectives and search warrants," he muttered, half aloud. "Tom Carlton was always a meddling ass! He is disappointed that there is no will—he expected a nice little legacy. Much will have more. Money goes to money," he soliloquised. "The girl did it, though why, if she believed herself to be—"

Here he panned, and stroked his chin reflectively, and glanced casually at the letters. As he did so, he jumped—yes, jumped—in his comfortable spring-seated chair. Did his eyes deceive him, or was it the port wine—or what had come over him? The room was only lit by one large, shaded, reading lamp, which, whilst throwing a brilliant light upon the writing-table, left the remainder of the apartment in comparative obscurity. There had been another lamp on the table near the door, but it seemed to have gone out quite mysteriously. The object at which Mr. Isaac Holroyd was staring, as if his eyes would leave their

sockets, was a very pretty white woman's hand sparkling with rings. It and a portion of wrist were under the full glare of the lamp; and this beautiful symmetrical hand had just closed, in a strong fierce grasp, upon the bundle of letters!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. ISAAC HOLROYD'S close-set, watery blue eyes stared out beyond the far side of the table into the surrounding gloom; and then he made out the owner of the hand—a woman with a hood over her head, the lower part of her face entirely concealed by her brown cloak, but her sharp black eyes were visible, and were fixed on him with piercing intensity. His few hairs seemed to rise erect upon his head, beads of perspiration stood out upon his bald brow—he was face to face with the notorious Brown Lady at last. Self-preservation is the first law of nature. He could not fly, for the apparition was between him and the door, so he turned round with a frantic impulse, and seized upon the poker, the only weapon within his reach.

"Miserable old man!" said a deep voice, "put down that poker at once. Put it down, I say," it continued, imperiously, "or I will throw that lamp at you!—moving her head towards it as she spoke—"and you shall perish as you deserve, and be consumed to ashes in the midst of all your ill-gotten wealth."

"Who—who are you?" he gasped in a hoarse voice.

"I am one who knows you well. I know all your dealings, and brother, take friend, and forger!"

"Get out, you lying scoundrel!" said the old man, with a sudden access of courage. "Give me back my letters, or I'll brain you! Give them back, I say, thief, and begone, before I raise the house!"

"Push the house, and you will! Who would venture to come near me?" said the figure. "Keep back! and put down that poker, or on your own head be the result!"

Something in the voice and eyes terrified him, and suddenly dropping the poker with a clang, he sank back into his arm-chair, completely cowed.

"Who are you? Are you a spirit—or human creature?"

"It is not far for you to know! It is sufficient to tell you that your days are numbered in this house!"

"Give me back those letters!" he said, starting up. "It's a scandal—a—cheat!"

"Compose yourself, Isaac; violence will not avail you! I have proofs that would send you—yes, aged, seemingly respectable, religious, and a county magistrate—to Portland prison for the rest of your life!"

"Proofs—what proofs?"

"Ay, you shall hear!" said the figure, suddenly leaving over and bringing its eyes closer to his.

It seemed to mesmerise him, whilst with distinct but rapid utterance it told him all the things that ever he did—deeds he believed known to no human eye but his own. It told him of scenes with his brother—ay, down to the one recently, when he had endeavoured to borrow money and failed!

It repeated whole conversations between him, his son, his brother, his late niece, Arabella—to which no mortal could have had knowledge. It told him of money secrets and money frauds known only to himself and his most privately-guarded memoranda.

In short, it terrified him so completely, and told him so much, that he could only mope and listen with fluttering heart and chattering teeth. He was convinced that he was in the presence of some she-devil!

"And now one last word," said the figure, impressively. "You have not much longer to live! You are sixty-nine and past! Make the most of the few remaining days, or months, or maybe years. Reform and repent in retirement!"

As these words were spoken, the figure suddenly turned down the lamp and left the room in darkness, and evidently vanished, for there was not another word—no, nor another sound!

For a few seconds Isaac Holroyd felt half stunned; then he got up, and, by the fire-light, staggered to the bell and tore at it frantically.

A servant responded running, believing the house to be on fire at the very least.

"Where is she?" almost screamed his master: "Bring a light—bring a light!"

"Where is who, sir?" asked the man, quickly relighting the lamp.

"Why the woman that was here! Did you not meet her on the stairs? A woman in a hood—dressed in brown—a brown cloak!"

"You must mean the 'Brown Lady,' sir," said the servant, after a moment's hesitation.

"No, I'm very thankful to say I did not meet her!"

"She must have gone out of that door and along the corridor. She had no other way of leaving this—"

"Not if she were flesh and blood, sir!" said the man, solemnly. "But the 'Brown Lady' is neither one or other! She does not want doors and passages! She can go through a stone wall!"

"Well, but letters—real letters—can't go through a stone wall. She has stolen most important letters!"

The servant looked respectfully perplexed.

"That figure—that brown woman—came here, and has carried off a packet of most valuable documents—letters—old letters no use to anyone but me. There's a band of brown elastic round them. They are mostly addressed to my brother. I tell you, Richards, if you can get me those letters back without any fuss or talk among the servants, I'll give you a couple of hundred pounds, that I will!"

Mr. Isaac looked livid as he spoke. The fear of the consequences resulting from these letters getting abroad was now far keener at the moment, seeing that he had the protection of Richards, than the awe he felt regarding his recent horrible truth-telling visitor. Vainly Richards hunted, and searched, and poked. Not a sign of the packet of letters with the brown band did he ever come across. And how could he? They were safely locked away in the Brown Lady's writing-table, in the haunted east wing!

"Now, my dear," she said, to her niece the next morning at breakfast, "your claims are clear, Isaac Holroyd will not be long in Carriabrooke. You shall be its mistress before many weeks are over!" and she proceeded to relate her visit of the previous evening.

"And if it all comes true," said the girl, "we will have no longer a shut up east wing, Aunt Eleanor. You will open the mysterious doors and panels, and come and live with me. You must—you are my only relative."

"My good girl, you mean well, but you are talking of impossibilities. Do you think I have lived all my life alone, aloof from the world, for nothing?"

"I suppose you have some reason, but time may—"

"Time can never remove it," she interrupted, quickly. "You said the other day that genius was the greatest gift. What is genius to a creature who can never, never mix with her fellows? who has been cursed—yes, cursed—with a face from which even an animal would recoil?"

"Aunt!"

"Yes. Do I, think you, wear this brown veil for nothing?" she asked, bitterly. "My face is so hideously deformed that I can't bear to look on it myself. I have not seen my reflection for years and years. If I had been born blind or hump-backed it would have been nothing—nothing!" she repeated, with a passionate ringing in her voice, "but to be born so as to have to hide oneself in horror all one's life!"

"You may think yourself worse than you are," said Linda, timidly.

"I could not, it would be impossible. And, Linda, I enjoin one thing on you—you must make me a solemn promise that when I die no prying hand, no peering eye, attempts to raise my veil. I'll carry my burden a secret to the grave!"

"I promise," said the girl, "promise solemnly. Did you meet with an accident, or were you born so?"

"I was born so. They say my mother, your great grandmother, a very beautiful and haughty woman, bitterly offended an old gipsy fortune-teller, and drove her out of the place with her dogs, and the old gipsy shrieked a curse that rankled for ever after in my mother's mind."

"You shall never have a son! But you will have two daughters, one will be a beauty and the other a beast! Your grandmother was born, and was a lovely infant; and grew to be a lovely woman. Some years afterwards I made my appearance; I was not the longest-for boy, and the gipsy's curse had come true!"

"My mother fainted when she saw me. I was sent away abroad, and brought up there in secrecy till my mother and father being dead, and I having come in for a large fortune as my sister's co-heiress, she sent for me, and gave me a home here, and here I am."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALL this time Sir Thomas Carlton and Rupert Daeres had not been idle, nor had the detectives that they had employed. But, as yet, no clue that could be called a "clue" had been discovered.

One or two items of news, indeed, had been picked up from Gordon Holroyd's man—news that might come in useful some day.

Gordon had taken to drinking very hard; indeed, he drank, not from the pure love of liquor, but as if it were to deliberately drown thought, and fuddle his brains. He gambled more than ever, and tempted fate so rashly that his losses were whispered at the clubs with distended eyes and bated breath.

"Gordon Holroyd must be mad!" men declared, "and the sooner he took lodgings in Hanwell the better!"

He was nervous, hated to be alone; was either uproariously merry or deeply depressed. He refused to return to Carriabrooke on any pretence whatever; letters, telegrams from his father all failed to move him. It was not the dread of being under the roof of the uncle he had murdered that deterred him—no, it was the hideous remorse he felt at the fate of the girl he had left to starve in the cellar.

At first he had meant to let her die, and let her secret die with her, and had gone off to London and stayed there two days.

Then he had drunk so heavily that for two days more he did not know what he was doing.

By this time he had repented.

On the fifth—the day of the funeral—he returned to Carriabrooke.

Of course she must be dead by that time; of course, he was now too late, and what was the use of descending to the cellar, only to see some horrible ghastly spectacle that would infallibly haunt him till his dying day? He did not want that, the old man was enough!

At last, such was Gordon Holroyd's extravagance, that in two months' time he had gambled away every halfpenny of his share of the ill-gotten gains, and was as short of funds as ever.

He lost five thousand pounds in one night, and he wrote and applied to his father for a heavy advance. But Isaac treated him as he had served himself; he took no notice of either letters or telegrams. And so, in the end—furiously angry—Gordon had to come in person.

He was moody and sulky until after dinner, when the good old port was put before him,

and the servants had withdrawn. (N.B., to discuss Mr. Gordon's wild, bloodshot eyes and very strange manner.)

Then he said abruptly,—

"Governor, you took no notice of my letters, and so I'm come in person! I want a thundering big cheque!"

"I'm afraid want must be your master!" said his parent, very coolly.

"Don't put me off with stale old sayings, but give me what I want!"

"And that is?"

"Fifteen thousand!"

"Good heavens, sir! are you mad? What have you done with what I made over to you two months ago? Do you suppose I have the Bank of England at my back?"

"No; but I suppose there's a good deal of cutting into two hundred thousand? I want my share!"

"Share! and have you not had it? Share! Beyond your allowance I won't give you another penny! I won't allow you to ruin me!"

"Won't you!" said his dutiful offspring, tossing off two glasses almost in a breath; and then, leaning his arms on the table, he said, in a hoarse voice, "You are to have everything, and I'm to have nothing. I'm to pull the chestnuts out of the fire, am I, and get nothing for my pains?"

"What—what do you mean?" stammered the old man, turning a dead, leaden colour. "Chestnuts out of the fire! What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Gordon, in a dreadful, rasping voice, "that I cleared the way for you!—that I did it!"

"I don't believe you!" almost shouted his father. "You don't know what you are saying, sir! You are drunk! roaring drunk!"

"I may be drunk, but I know what I am saying! I tell you, and it's as well you should know, and know my claim, that I did it! The old man would have lived another twenty years!"

"Gordon, your mind is giving way! You know it was the girl! The proofs are clear as day!"

"I am glad you think so! I did for her too!"

Mr. Isaac Holroyd grasped the table with both hands, and gazed at his son with a face like that of a corpse. He could not speak.

"I did!" continued Gordon, doggedly. "I am sorry for her!"

"Where?" said his father, in a dreadful whisper.

"In the old kitchens."

Dead silence. At last Gordon spoke.

"Of course, you are safe, safe as myself. And I'll tell you what, give me a good round sum down, and I'll leave the country, and never set foot in it again!"

But, bad man as he was, Isaac Holroyd was stricken speechless by this horrible confession.

He sat with a vacant, glassy look in his eyes, and uttered no sound. Presently he rose, as if to leave the room, and fell down on the floor. He had had a paralytic seizure.

Meanwhile Rupert Daeres had become completely discouraged. The whole affair seemed to him to be wrapped in an incomprehensible mystery.

In his own mind, he firmly believed that Linda Delafosse had been murdered by Gordon Holroyd, and that she was concealed or buried somewhere about the place.

He never would see her again—dead or alive—that was certain; but if he could but be the means of bringing her murderer to justice, that would be some small consolation. But what chance of finding any clue in that great building, with its two hundred rooms, or among its acres of pleasure grounds?

All the same, his steps often tended in that direction; and it was now the month of April, and many an April evening he haunted the woods and avenues; turned out after dinner, glad to escape from his stepmother's tongue

and Maria Cotton's glances, and with a light overcoat over his evening clothes, he would saunter about Carriebrooke demesne alone and unnoticed, for a couple of hours, smoking and thinking—unnoticed by all but the Brown Lady. In her own nocturnal walks she had seen him several times, but concealed herself promptly. And now that Linda was convalescent, she determined to send her forth, and make this young man of some use in communicating with the outer world.

But Linda, strange to say, was reluctant to undertake the embassy.

She was weak and shaken after her severe illness, her nerves had gone to pieces in consequence of her terrible experiences.

She knew the black cloud under which her name lay, and had now a most sensitive shrinking from meeting anyone until her name was cleared—if cleared it could ever be!

"Can we not wait?" she suggested to her aunt.

"Wait for what?" demanded that strong-minded person. "Wait till Isaac Holroyd dies? If you mean that, you may wait years! Wait till Gordon confesses? You may wait for ever! No, no! we will have no waiting. Things must be at once put in train to prove your innocence, and to prove your rights, no later than to-night. You must speak to Rupert Daeres."

"Could you not manage to speak to him?"
"No. Daeres is not one of your timid folk, who would run away from the Brown Lady. He is much more likely to chase or shoot me! And pray what would become of you then?"
"How do you know he will come this evening?"

"I have a presentiment. You know that part of this demesne joins Daeres Court? And young Daeres comes over at least twice a week, and strolls about as if he were looking for something. He is generally in the copper-beech avenue, beyond the pleasure-ground. There will be a moon at nine o'clock."

"I—I am afraid to go!" confessed the girl at last.

"Afraid of what?" demanded the other, scornfully. "If you had said this six months ago I might have understood you. You would have been afraid of me. Now you have no excuse whatever. You know what I am worth as an apparition!"

"I may meet Gordon Holroyd!"
"Pooh! And if you do, he will fly from you, you may be sure of that."

Miss Eleanor had her way, of course; but she mitigated her grandniece's fears by promising to go with her, and to remain within earshot. Accordingly, at nine o'clock that evening, the two ladies sallied forth arm-in-arm—for it was Linda's first outdoor excursion, and she felt dizzy, and her knees trembled under her as she walked. Her aunt was her staff, and as strong and as upright as a young fir tree.

She wore her usual attire—her brown mantle, Linda her seal-skin coat, with a silk handkerchief tied over her head.

It was a cool but beautiful spring night; the birds were in bed, of course; there was not a sound to be heard but the hooting of an owl, or the quick flap of a passing bat's wing. There was something eerie about the stillness, as the two figures turned into the long, and but little frequented, "Beech Avenue." The silence was presently broken by the faint sound of horses' hoofs trotting, coming toward them, nearer and nearer, and then a high dog-cart came in sight, drawn by a spanking bay mare, and driven by Gordon Holroyd, who was returning from some local steeple-chases in a condition that his groom who sat behind with folded arms, subsequently expressed as "uncommonly fresh."

Gordon was late, which accounted for his coming home by the little used north or beech avenue. Gordon had, to a certain extent, drowned care—had forgotten his crimes, his sick father, and his debts. He had won some money, he had drunk a quan-

tity of champagne, he was exhilarated by the quick drive through the cool evening air.

He puffed at his cigar, he flicked his free-going horse, he cast his eyes casually round. These old beeches were no much money wasted—sunk. He would cut down every blessed tree. His father was in a precarious state; he had not spoken since his stroke, his right hand was quite withered and powerless. He was practically dead. Musing thus, filially, Gordon's eyes fell on a figure, a figure seated on a log at the edge of the drive! Figure of a woman, figure of a girl—the girl he had left to starve!

Yes, the full moon shone directly on her face as it was turned towards him. Oh! what a white, worn face! Oh, what a pair of dark, accusing eyes!—eyes that would haunt him for ever! He dared not look again! With a smothered imprecation he suddenly lashed the mare into a gallop, and tore up the remainder of the avenue as if a legion of fiends were in pursuit.

Trembling and perfectly sobered, he said, as he descended and threw the reins to his astonished groom,—

"Did you see it, Green?"

"See what, sir?"

"Why that thing, that figure in the avenue!"

"No, sir, I saw nothing!" said the servant. "I was too much taken up, striving to hold on, you started off that quick. If I may make bold, sir, you had best not try that game on again with the mare, it ain't safe! She'd done her five-and-twenty miles to-day and was pretty sober; but only for that," and he shook his head emphatically.

"Rubbish! That mare would never run away with me!" and to himself, as he walked up the steps, "There are worse things than runaway mares! I'll clear out of this to-morrow!"

(To be continued.)

JUDITH.

—o:—

CHAPTER XXI.—(continued.)

JUDITH'S reply was so quietly given that Mrs. Trevor felt ashamed; but she had a difficult part to play, and could not afford to make any concession, nor to give up an advantage.

"Then may I, without undue curiosity, inquire why you have claimed the aid of an out-cast from society, as Gerald Sherston now is,"—her voice falling her in spite of an endeavour—"to hunt down a person who is unfortunate enough to resemble someone else, and who you acknowledge to have been so unlucky as to have aroused your displeasure?"

"I do not believe you think so ill of me as it suits you to pretend; and you must know that my only reason for acting as I have done is my love for Winifred—my wish to save her from unhappiness if I can."

Mrs. Trevor was on her knees before the fire, pushing the logs of wood into closer proximity with each other with the point of a small pair of bellows.

There was the slightest pause before she answered, during which she had altered her tactics.

"You are quite right. I do not misjudge you so, I credit every word you have said; but I warn you others will not be so easy to persuade. When one girl interferes to prevent another's marriage the motive is pretty generally guessed to be jealousy, especially when the man is reputed very rich. Besides, it is always a false step to attack the character of anyone, unless you are certain of being able to prove what you affirm."

"I do not think I shall fail, if you will help me."

"That I cannot promise to do," hastily.

"Do you intend to deny that Mr. Johnson and Michael Sraughan are one and the same

person!" cried Judith, bringing her bright blue eyes to bear, in angry surprise, upon her companion's face.

"Well, no; I would not go so far as that. I admit there may be a likeness; but of course it is such a very long time ago, and my knowledge of the man was, even then, so very slight, that I should not like to assert anything about him one way or the other."

Notwithstanding the carelessness of her tone there could be no question but that she meant all, perhaps more, than she said; and Judith could with difficulty conceal the disappointment that she felt, having hoped so much from this interview.

Rather mechanically smoothing and drawing up her long tan gloves, she stood in front of Mrs. Trevor with the obvious intention of saying good-bye.

"You have not tasted your tea, and I am afraid it is quite cold. Let me pour you out some more," remarked her hostess, sweetly.

There was only a slight headshake, no word in reply.

The two hands touched for a moment, then fell asunder; but a slight tremulous flash of the diamonds on the fingers that clasped her own encouraged Judith to make a last appeal.

"Are you determined not to help me?" she asked, with wistful emphasis.

"It is not that. You must not think me so disobliging. It is simply that my memory is too bad, too treacherous. I dare not depend on it."

She smiled, and nodded pleasantly in farewell; but when the door closed behind her visitor the stereotyped expression was succeeded by one of actual pain.

Every year of her age was written in deep and legible lines upon her face, as with a quick, nervous interclapping of her fingers she turned towards the bright light of the fire, and stood so, motionless and almost unconscious of her attitude for far longer than she knew.

A chance had been given her to expiate, in part, an injury inflicted years ago; yet though the chance had been earnestly desired, even prayed for, she had let it go by now, with scarcely a moment's hesitation.

Whether in so doing, she had acted wisely or well only time could decide.

CHAPTER XXII.

STANDING ALONE.

AS JUDITH walked home sore at heart, and almost inclined to despair, some one who had caught sight of her easy pliant figure from a distance, recognising it at a glance, rode up quickly alongside. When she involuntarily raised her eyes at the sound of the horse's feet stopping suddenly short she saw it was Laurence St. Quentin, and felt some pleasure at the meeting.

He was so utterly unconnected with the trouble in which she had become involved that merely to speak to him, and to look into his handsome careless face, helped to lift her for a while beyond it, and gave her a delightful sense of rest.

It was no wonder, since the sex is naturally vain, and requires less encouragement to hope than is generally supposed, that he should gather more than was meant to be expressed from the brightening of her eyes and the smile with which she extended her hand.

"It is ages since we met," he began.

With this she concurred, thinking of all that had happened in the meantime.

"And you have not been having a good time, I am afraid. Is Miss Sherston better?"

"Nearly well. At first we were very anxious about her."

"I thought of you so often," he said, allowing a vein of tenderness to creep into his tones as he gazed into her downcast face, the expression of which was softer than usual just then in thinking of Winifred and the illness which might have been so serious—

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perhaps a little disturbed by his propinquity as well.

"To me it is the saddest thing I ever saw or heard of," he went on:—"to think of you—who must have been so dearly loved and cared for all your life—here adrift among strangers who are not capable of appreciating you, who—"

"Am I so difficult to appreciate?" she interpolated quaintly, and rather dashed his eloquence.

"You know what I mean, or perhaps you do not know. I suppose no beautiful woman ever does understand what she is to those who admire her."

"Ought I to thank you for a compliment?" Yet though she laughed at him as she spoke she was conscious of an undefinable sense of satisfaction at his words, while a new shyness kept the colour coming and going in her cheeks—a fact he was quick to see, and the importance of which he was also inclined to exaggerate.

"There is no such thing as a compliment between 'friends,' and I think we decided we might be that at least to one another," he said.

"You have so many 'friends,'" she retorted, and then was vexed with herself that she had not better concealed the bitterness she felt on this subject. That he would know she was alluding to Mrs. Hare she was convinced, and could only fumble nervously with the buttons of her long tan gloves, not daring to look into his face to judge by its expression what he thought, and vainly hoping he would let the remark go unchallenged.

Man like, he was not impervious to the flattery implied, and a passionate light leapt into his eyes as he noted her sweet confusion, tasting all the delight that a knowledge of mastery is calculated to inspire.

To strive after, and to achieve success is a man's especial ambition, whether in love, or war, or sport; but surely no victory can be so exquisitely dear unto his soul as that over the heart of any woman lovely and beloved. To see eyes that have been hitherto pure and passionless grow troubled before they sink abashed, or lips that have only curled in scorn move tremulously as the whole frame thrills and quivers in response to the merest word—a look—must be truer satisfaction for the moment than the conquest of any city, the slaughter of the rarest game.

All this, little as he was given to analysis of any sort, St. Quentin dimly felt, and his voice faltered with uncontrollable emotion as he protested quickly, while eager glances accented every word—

"I have no other friend than you. I wish to have no other."

"And Mrs. Hare?"

She felt impelled to follow up her involuntary error rather than retrieve it; but was repentant when she saw his face flush darkly before he turned and busied himself with the bridle of the pony he was leading now, as they walked on together, side by side.

"She is nothing to me; nothing at all," he declared, presently, still averting his gaze.

Her silence seemed to convey to him more of incredulity than she could well have expressed by speech.

He hesitated. It was impossible for him to say out what he more than suspected, that the fact of his being at Mrs. Hare's house, and in the attitude in which she had found him was a planned thing, due to jealousy on the part of a woman who had shown some partiality for himself, and was consequently loth to see him pass away from her thrall and go into willing bondage to another.

The common honour which impels a man to guard a woman's secret more closely than she herself might deem it necessary to do, as well as the respect which the most careless must feel for the innocence of a young girl, to whom all the intricacies of such social problems must be quite inexplicable, forbade his even touching on the subject ever so lightly.

"You are quite mistaken; utterly so, and it is very difficult to explain, but—"

"But, indeed, you owe me no explanation," she interrupted, quickly, by some womanly instinct divining his difficulty. "It is only natural that you should have other acquaintances, a great many besides myself, who have only met you a few times, and who—"

It was his turn to interrupt, and he did so, eagerly:—

"Don't withdraw your promise, please. It has been more pleasure to me than you can ever guess, to think that you have deigned to let me call you 'friend.'"

"Still there is no reason why I should be the only one," blushing slightly.

"You do not quite realize my feeling on the subject, and of course I cannot expect you to share it; but to me it would seem a species of disloyalty to our friendship to even speak to another woman, or glance her way; and whether that were so or no, I should not care to do so; it could not afford me any pleasure. Can you not understand that?"

"Perhaps," slowly, and with some irrelevance, trying to infuse indifference as well as doubt into her voice, though her pulse beat fast with wild and disproportionate delight.

She was afraid he would see how it was with her—afraid that he might read her heart before she herself was aware what had been written there. As yet she was not certain of herself, and the events which had claimed her attention of late had given her no time to dwell upon merely sentimental problems. Whether she cared for him or would ever care she could not now determine; yet that the question should ever have been raised in her mind was proof of the interest he had roused.

Formerly, she had never speculated on such subjects.

Nor was she deceived by his talk of friendship. Having had many admirers, some of whom had also been ardent lovers, she was aware to what such professions always tended. She knew he loved her, or at least was learning to do so; and the thought, though it possessed her with a strange and powerful fascination, troubled her as well.

The chords of her heart had remained silent so long; and now that they were stirred into unrest she was startled at the idea that there might be something coming into her life—a stronger impulse than any she had ever known—against which it would be impossible to combat.

It might only be a prelude to the wilder, sweeter music some other hand with more masterful and thrilling touch would evoke; but even this faint vibrating of the strings filled her with fear, and she was only conscious of a wish to escape, and for the time to ignore the subject whose depths she dare not fathom.

"I promise I will never speak to Mrs. Hare again, except when bare civility demands," broke in St. Quentin, seeing that her thoughts were deeply engaged, and hoping they might be set on him.

"I do not ask such a promise—I do not desire it!" her head uplifted proudly.

"But it is a satisfaction to me to give it. By-and-bye, you will understand that I only care to please you, no one else. And then—"

She had hurried on, anxious to avoid the dénouement for which she was unprepared, and now stood breathless at the gate of the Commissioner's compound with outstretched hand.

"Must you go?" he pleaded.

She nodded, finding it difficult to speak. When they halted he was at the other side of his pony, and now leant across the saddle looking straight into her eyes, with an earnest compelling gaze.

He was very tall, very strong, very handsome; and he had, moreover, a consciousness of his own attractions, which, while never descending to puerile vanity, lent them treble force. He knew that women had always found it hard to resist him when he tried his best to please; and perhaps it was the dawning smile on his mouth that warned Judith of her danger then.

"I must go at once. Winifred is expecting me," she said quickly.

Drawing himself to his full height, he came round, stood beside her, and took her hand.

"But some other day you will listen to all I have to say. Not now, but soon, very soon, I hope I shall see you again, and then—"

He stopped of his own accord, not because of any interruption, relinquishing her hand slowly.

And with one frightened glance into his face Judith murmured a faint "good-bye" and fled, feeling that she had been fortunate to escape so.

Had he pressed her at that moment she was conscious she might have acceded to his suit, the glamour of his good looks having been strong upon her.

She was glad that she had gained for herself time to reflect—glad and yet half regretful—for she had a difficult part to play, and a man's strong arm might have helped her to success, or, at least, would have supported her in failure.

Was she becoming worsted in the unequal struggle that this novel consciousness of weakness should oppress her so?

Going straight to Winifred's room she found her there alone, in her usual place on the couch, near the window, and looking out into the garden.

She turned, however, at the sound of the opening door, and her reddened eyelids struck Judith anew with a feeling of impotence. It was terrible that she could do nothing—nothing at all to help her in this strait.

"You have been fretting!" she exclaimed, reproachfully, crossing over to her side.

Winifred tried to smile, a rather watery effort.

"I have been by myself, and am never a very cheery disposition, as you know."

"Has he been bothering you?"

"He? Oh, no! He never comes when you are not here."

A hard look came into Judith's face.

Had the man loved Winifred for herself there might have been some excuse for his cruel claim upon her hand; but he was actuated only by a desire to gain a certain status in the world, and had no pity for the suffering he caused.

He was beneath contempt—if only he might not prove beyond revenge!

"Listen, Winifred!" she said, impressively; "long ago I promised to save you from a marriage with this man, and I have not been idle, indeed; only everything just now seems to go amiss. I had almost given up hope, but for your sake I will persevere; and don't despair, Winifred. Surely if right is might we must succeed!"

The faint gleam of interest in the girl's grey eyes faded out almost at once; she sighed, as she said, gratefully,—

"You are very good; there is no one like you, I think—so strong and self-reliant; but it is just in that you may make a mistake. You cannot imagine, much less cope with, his wickedness!"

"I am wiser already as regards that. I have found out a great deal about him; the only thing I lack now is proof."

"And without that your knowledge is worth nothing. Take my advice, Judith, and give it up. You will only hurt yourself and not help me; and, remember, you cannot injure him without injuring my father too. What I am doing I volunteered to do, and am resigned to the fate I chose!"

"But you have no business to be resigned. That is I believe the reason you don't get well quicker than you do. Even an ineffectual resistance is better for you than this supineness."

"Who is preaching rebellion to my gentle fiancée?" asked a sneering voice behind her, which, without turning, she knew to belong to Mr. Johnson.

"It was I," she retorted boldly; keeping between him and the shrinking figure on the

couch. "I was telling Winifred that she had no spirit."

"I like her best without. In a sweetheart it might amuse one, perhaps, and certainly could not alarm; but one would wish one's wife to be amenable to discipline."

He spoke calmly, but with decision; and by a threatened touch upon her arm forced Judith to stand aside, taking a seat close to where Winifred lay.

"You would prefer to please me, would you not?" he asked, looking down at her with almost a menacing look in his cruel near-set eyes.

"Have I not proved it?" she counter-questioned, in a low voice, crimsoning painfully as she met his glance.

Taking her unresisting fingers he pressed them lightly against his lips before he turned to Judith.

"You see we understand each other," he observed with triumphant malice. Too indignant to reply, she turned and left the room, while again that unwonted craving for aid, the support of a man's strong arm and intellect, came over her. It was strange that the form which in her mind became associated with that yearning was not that of the lover who that very day had almost succeeded in winning ascendancy over her heart, but that of the cousin who was thousands of miles away, and perhaps long ere this had reconciled himself to the position of rejected suitor. It was not St. Quentin's handsome face with the passionate light in his blue eyes, as she had seen him last, but Aron's steadfast gaze, when smothering his own feelings he smiled bravely as he bade her farewell, that seemed to come before her and convince her of her helplessness, standing as she did alone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FALSE OR TRUE.

THE Commissioner's office stood in his compound, only the tennis courts intervening between it and the flower-beds that were arranged round the portico of the front door. From the drawing room windows there was an uninterrupted view of the building, so that Judith, standing there the following morning, could not help noting the unusual sight of a lady walking up to the entrance and being instantly admitted. Even a momentary glance determined it to be Mrs. Trevor, for not only did she habitually affect white in her garments and large straw hats that her detractors were fond of declaring would have been more suitable to a woman half her age, but she had a tripping gait that could not easily be mistaken; and Judith felt some uneasiness as to whether the visit would not prove to be connected with the appeal she had made the day before, wishing earnestly that she had taken the precaution of extracting a pledge of secrecy when she spoke.

If this were indeed so—if the knowledge she possessed were to be betrayed to Mr. Sherston, and through him to the very man it was most necessary to keep in the dark on the subject—then all her schemes would be in vain, for forewarned in this case would be forearmed.

He would hurry on the marriage, and thus render futile all her attempts to collect proofs; for whatever happened, and however great her own cause for wrath, she could never avenge herself on Winifred's husband. This he would guess, and was certainly not above trading on the fact. She was aroused from her disturbed thoughts by a convulsive grip upon her arm.

It was Mrs. Sherston, who had been standing there some time, but who only now put in words the question that had been burning on her lips.

"Who was it?" she asked, her sharp-featured face looking more than ordinarily stern from the repression of emotion that she felt.

"It was Mrs. Trevor," answered Judith.

Mrs. Sherston relinquished her grasp, and moved away. Judith thought that she had left the room, but when she turned to look round presently she saw her sitting in her usual chair with some embroidery in her hand, which she seemed to be working with her ordinary precision. She became conscious of Judith's glance at once.

"Don't go away, Miss Holt, if you have nothing particular to do. Watch there, and let me know when Mrs. Trevor leaves. I have something to say to her."

Wondering a little at the request, yet glad on her own account to discover whether this were merely a friendly visit, or with a serious object referring to herself and her unfortunate application, Judith obeyed. So, for nearly an hour, she stood and waited, while in the centre of the room Mrs. Sherston counted her stitches aloud in a phlegmatic tone, meant to assure the hearer of her own perfect indifference to what was going on.

Then Mrs. Trevor left, emerging as she had entered—alone; and Judith, too, moved from her point of espionage.

"She is going. Shall I run out and call her myself, or send a servant?" she asked.

"Do neither. It does not matter. I can write a note," was the curt rejoinder, the work still progressing, and with apparently deep attention lavished on it.

But when Judith went out the needle dropped from her fingers; and her watch, which had several times been stealthily consulted, was again drawn from her belt, while a quick frown contracted her brows as she saw how long a period had elapsed.

It is a mistake to suppose jealousy only a folly of youth. No time in life can its pangs be so acute as when reason can give no comforting assurance, and faith must rest poised on her own divine wings, with no foundation for her feet on earth.

A woman's empire, depending chiefly on charms that the years destroy, is at best a very short one; and if unhappily she has not managed during that brief season to rivet the chains, which then are easily forged, with a strength calculated to endure, even when the brightness of metal has ceased to dazzle and delight, she can hope little from after efforts.

When Mrs. Sherston married it had been without love, and from the first she had only endeavoured to influence her husband's actions in so far as they concerned herself, and her small ambitions; not attempting to gain a firm hold on his affections.

She had been bright and amusing in those days—a good dancer, a beautiful rider, and had not lacked admirers; but afterwards, when bad health robbed her of her good looks, and had accentuated the sharpness of repartee into actual ill-nature, these failed her, and she turned naturally to the man she had married for his society and sympathy.

Then it was, with something more than mere discomfiture, she realised that the slight fancy he had had for her—born of pique and wounded pride—had been utterly destroyed by her indifference, and that it would never be revived, his thoughts having in the meantime drifted back into their old channel.

The only woman he had ever loved, yet whom, from loyalty to his brother, he had voluntarily renounced, had also married in the interval, and perhaps, had she been happy in her choice he would more easily have resigned himself to the inevitable; but John Trevor was by no means a pattern spouse, and clung to the habits of his bachelorhood from the very outset, never allowing a thought of his young wife to restrain him from indulgence in any favourite pursuit.

Nearly all the leave he could procure he spent in Cashmere, penetrating into the wilds beyond Yarlund and Lech, so that even had she been inclined she could scarcely have accompanied him; while even in cantonments his leisure hours were mostly occupied in playing racquets or polo, and for the last year

he had been in Burmah, having volunteered as transport officer for duty.

Since their parting, twenty-three years before, the Commissioner and Lillian Trevor had not met until some eighteen months ago chance had once again thrown them in the same station.

The time that had elapsed and the changes which that time had brought might reasonably be supposed to have done away with all question of danger in the meeting; but Mrs. Sherston's jealousy, having smouldered all this while, burst into sudden flame on being confronted with her rival.

Carefully disguising her real feelings, she embarked at once into a sort of patronising friendship for the flighty, yet not ill-intentioned grass-widow, and lost no opportunity of flaunting her prosperity before her gaze.

To every elaborate entertainment she was invariably bidden, as well as to the more unceremonious parties which were given; but up to this date Mrs. Sherston had never succeeded in discovering any sign or symptom of intimacy between her and her husband.

So far as she knew, and in the matter she had been Argus-eyed, they had never exchanged a syllable in private.

This deliberate seeking of him in his office staggered her from its very audacity, and she was at a loss how to circumvent such a daring move, startled, too, to find how deeply she herself was concerned therein.

Nor was Mr. Sherston less surprised when raising his eyes from a paper in which he had been earnestly engrossed he beheld before him the woman whom he had loved all his life, but from whom he had been divided more absolutely by the canons of conventionality than by any barriers of distance.

While he rose awkwardly from his chair and with a vanity of which he was scarcely conscious removed his pince-nez, the red-coated *chuprassie* who had ushered her in withdrew, leaving them alone.

She stood there, hesitating how to explain to him the reason of her visit, and a warm blush mounting to her face made it look quite young and pretty in the shadow of her big hat.

Even had his sight been clearer than it was he would have seen no lines about the mouth that once he had so fondly kissed, no wrinkles round the eyes that had once looked such tenderness into his own.

A charm was over him for the moment, and he could not help fancying that all that had happened in his life since they parted in anger was a dream, and he need only now concern himself about the reality of her presence. At a word he would have thrown himself at her feet and declared himself unchanged, in spite of all that had passed.

But she did not share the enthusiasm of his delusion, was not even conscious of it.

In her own case a strenuous, constant effort to appear young, not entirely disdaining the aid of art, might help to deceive him for the moment; but there was nothing in the tall, thin and elderly man who waited, glasses in hand, for her to speak, to remind her of the young lover who had wooed her so ardently, renounced her so remorselessly, years ago.

"You must think it very strange, my coming here," she began.

He handed her a chair, and with somewhat stilted politeness assured her she was welcome, that he would be only too happy to serve her in any way.

"You mistake," she interrupted, quickly. "I would not ask your help if I were dying! It was to help you, to warn you of a threatened danger, I came here."

He went over to the door, which still stood ajar, and closed it carefully; then returning sat down in his former place, prepared to listen to what she had to say.

When Judith first mentioned Stranghan's name he had expected more to follow, though then no definite fear was in his mind as to the knowledge she might possess. Now he felt it

had only been the beginning of the end—the first faint cloud that might spread and darken his whole horizon.

He was not surprised, nor did he move a muscle of his face, as Mr. Trevor went on,—"I have always known that Mr. Johnson was no other than your old clerk, Michael Straughan, the man who absconded to escape an inquiry that was being raised then—the Chappora bribery case, you know. I recognised him at once; but so long as it was only I who knew it did not matter, for I would not betray you!"

Even in his keen anxiety to know what other held this weapon against him he could not help being thrilled by the tone of her voice as it rang out clear and musical in her asseveration.

For the moment the identity of the Mrs. Trevor he had met in friendly intercourse for the last eighteen months was submerged in that of Lillian Grey he had not seen for twenty-three years. So she had protested, then her love and truth, and he had not believed her.

"Who else knows?" he asked, feeling the necessity of putting away from him the folly of such thoughts, and almost relieved to find that in asking the question his interest in the answer intensified and grew.

"Miss Holt, your daughter's companion. She came to me and asked me to support her in a charge against Mr. Johnson. I refused to do so."

"Why?"

"Because it would have injured you. Even at the time of that inquiry there were some who said that if Straughan were guilty you must have been implicated too; and it is well known that he were under your roof now, bearing an assumed name, an honoured guest and engaged to marry your daughter, those vague suspicions which were rife then would become certainties."

She kept her face turned away from him, not wishing to see him wince beneath her words. Though she had judged it better to say out the whole truth at once she could not harden herself to look upon his shame; the memory of the old days was too present with her then.

Indeed, I doubt if a woman can ever divest the man she once loved of the halo which that love cast round him; and despite the love of pleasure, the craving for admiration which had become to her a second nature, Lillian Trevor was at heart a very woman still. She could never quite forget the one romance of her otherwise frivolous lifetime.

The Commissioner had become ashen grey in his pallor; no one knew better than he that once an accusation is breathed, ever so lightly, it only takes a little time for it to become substantiated, and the idea that a secret known to two women could remain a secret long he would have laughed to scorn. Yet just then he could not concentrate his thoughts on the danger of his own position, so strong was his curiosity to account for her action in the matter.

Was it from a tardy desire to atone for the past she came now and warned him of the threatened blow; or had she been moved by more womanly caprice, a desire to have some influence upon his fate?

"And why?" he began, falteringly, then broke off altogether. But she understood what was in his mind.

"Why have I interfered? Why am I here? I wonder if you will believe me now when I tell you that it is because I loved you years ago, though then you doubted, and thought I cared for your money, your position."

"And did you not?" he asked, but had the grace to look ashamed when she flashed upon him a quick, scornful glance.

"It is scarcely worth while making protestations now, and yet all these years I have been longing for an opportunity of proving to you that I loved you for yourself, that for no other reason would I have jilted your brother."

"So you told me once before."

The accent of hesitation in his tone she

answered by drawing out Gerald Sheraton's letter from her pocket, and placing it in his hand, watching him read it; not speaking until, with trembling fingers, he laid it on the table beside him. Then she explained.

"It was Miss Holt brought it to me yesterday. Chance has thrown them together, and, at his advice, she asked my aid. You see he offers me a strong inducement to help her in saying that it will be a reparation for the injury he suffered at my hands. How deep that injury was you know. It is possible you have seen him lately. I saw him only a short time ago, and could guess something of what he had gone through in the cruel lines upon his face. He was terribly changed—terribly!"

"Poor Jerry!" interpolated the Commissioner, softly.

Perhaps she did not hear, for she went on quickly,—

"You know if I am very hard-hearted, I think even if you doubted the motive of my act, you never doubted that I was repentant when I heard how it affected him, and of what madness it was the cause. You remember I was very ill, and for long, long afterwards his face haunted me; even in sleep, I could not escape the memory of it, for I knew it was I who had wrecked his life, I who was responsible for his wretchedness and guilt. This letter came as a great temptation. Always I had prayed that some day I might be able to atone, and when the chance came—I let it go by. Stronger than my desire to please him was the wish to show you beyond dispute that it was *you* I loved, always, only you. Do you believe it now?"

"Yes, I believe you," he said, sadly, with not a trace of exultation in his tone.

After all, what did it matter at this period of their lives whether she had been true to him or no? He almost believed he would have preferred to think her false still than be weighed down by the thought that, but for his own incredulity, they might have been together all these years, happy notwithstanding the gloomy shadow which the misfortune of another must have thrown over both.

"You cannot blame me," he said, querulously. "You had deceived me once in not telling me you were engaged to my own brother; it was not to be wondered at that when I heard the truth I should think you had deceived me doubly, that for mercenary reasons, not for love, you had allowed me to supplant poor Jerry."

"I never blamed you. I think I liked you all the better for your loyalty to him. But I am glad you know the truth now."

She rose slowly from her seat as she spoke. The colour which excitement had brought to her face had faded and her face looked pinched and worn. It was far easier for the Commissioner to realise the flight of time now than it had been on her first entrance, when the momentary glow had made her look more youthful, and he was taken by surprise.

"May I keep this?" he asked, soberly, tapping the letter with his fingers.

"It is no good to me. What shall you do in the matter?"

"I hardly know; it is difficult to decide what is best. Do you know what animus that girl has against Mr. Johnson?"

"She is only anxious to prevent his marriage with Winifred. If the engagement were broken off I believe he would have nothing to fear from her."

He sighed, and passed his hand with a gesture of utter weariness through his hair; and so deeply was she moved to pity that she crossed over to his side, and her fingers closed with a tight, warm pressure over his as they lay upon the table.

"I am very sorry for you. I wish you well through it all!" she murmured indistinctly, looking down with infinite compassion into his thin face, on which anxiety had worn more lines than age.

With mute gratitude he returned her gaze, feeling that it would be impossible to say out all that was in his heart, and certainly unwise.

The career had recalled old tendernesses the memory of which made him yearn as he had never done before for womanly sympathy and love; at the same time a keen remorse filled him for the injustice he had inflicted on her, while admiring the patience with which she had suffered it and completely vindicated herself at last.

His sight was dimmed with an unwonted moisture, and, as he lifted his hand to clear it, she passed from the room with an almost inaudible, "good-bye."

When he looked up again she was gone, the door closed behind her; his eyes fell instead upon a frame on his writing-table that contained the portrait of his wife, hard-featured and cold, in spite of the self-complacent smile which, for the occasion, she had adopted; and so marked was the contrast between what "might have been" and what unhappily was, that out of the very bitterness of his soul he laughed aloud.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A QUESTION OF LOVE.

THERE comes a time in the life of every man when the pleasures of his bachelor life seem to pall; and, however brilliant may have been the existence he has led, it appears stale and profitless in comparison with purer, if more conventional, domestic joys.

In Colonel Lea-Cragh's case this crisis had been very long in coming. He had always prided himself on being a butterfly, and impervious to the attractions that young girls possessed for some, but not for him. No! Byron himself felt more scorn of the prettiness of the bread-and-butter type than did he; moreover, he had had some reason to plume himself upon the conquests he had made of quite as pretty, and more piquante, older women. Not always had he been, as he was now, corpulent and pompous; there had been a time when he was as popular as any officer in the mounted arm of the service, when he had been able to depend completely on his personal attributes, and needed not his other recommendations of money and a good position.

That he had not realised when this time was over was an error, and no uncommon one. Can any one deliberately decide when their own youth is past, when their own good looks are waning? It is seldom indeed that the date is not fixed at a considerably later period than others would have fixed it for us.

But latterly Lea-Cragh had experienced some faint misgivings on this subject. It may have been that his patent admiration for Judith made him less warmly welcomed by other women; but certainly he found them more unwilling to be monopolised by him, more chary, too, of accepting his presents—for he was naturally generous to a fault, and may have also found it diplomatic to supplement his attentions with more solid advantages. However this might have been, his fears were aroused—the dread of a lonely, old age constantly recurring, and spoiling his delight in the good things that were still at his disposal. He pictured himself a superannuated bachelor about town, with none of the prestige that now surrounded him as colonel of a crack cavalry corps; and a vision of the life that might be his were Judith to become his wife seemed even more alluring by the contrast. To do him justice, he was also honestly fond of the girl—honestly desirous of rescuing her from the dependent position in which he guessed she was not happy, and by giving her all that he possessed brightening her lot.

It was not till the day of their interview with Gerald Sheraton that any definite intention of asking her to marry him was formed in his mind; but the more he thought the matter out, the more convinced he became that it would be for the happiness of both

were the idea to be consummated, and his fascination grew.

The next time he saw her they were at a gymkhana, she listening with what the Colonel thought considerable eagerness, to Captain St. Quentin as he talked to her.

That their conversation was about the races he did not doubt, and was conscious of some twinges of regret that he himself had no knowledge on the subject.

In spite of his profession, and though his name was enrolled as a matter of course among the stewards at every local meeting, he was by no means a horsey man—scarcely, indeed, knew one pony from another, and had hitherto been sufficiently brave to avow the fact.

Now, for the first time, he felt his deficiencies in this respect as he noted her evident interest, and the quick gaze with which she followed the ponies as they cantered along the course.

Captain St. Quentin was the owner of several racers, one of which he was riding in a steeplechase, and wore his silk jacket underneath a light overcoat.

"I wish I could ride them all, but I am too heavy," he was saying to his companion, while Judith looked vaguely sympathetic, not quite comprehending how far it was a case for pity.

Winifred's little terrier was seated on his hind legs, waving his paws with the desolate air of one who finds himself alone in a crowd.

Several times he had been made to leave his mistress by main force; and though when actually away he enjoyed the running about, he did so under protest, and never of his own free will would leave the sick room.

Now, with a low whine, he called attention to his hard fate, and Judith took a biscuit from a tray that was handed to her by a kit-matghar with tea and coffee, and gave it to him in bits.

"He is so miserable now Winifred is ill, and won't leave her for a moment if he can help it. Poor little Dandy!" she said, and stooping stroked his long, white, silky hair.

"I wish you would bestow your pity elsewhere; it is sorely needed! Are you never sorry for me? That day after day I can never see you nor speak to you, though I manoeuvre all I know."

"It was only the other day—" she began. "A week ago!" he interrupted, scornfully, and his eloquent blue eyes rested on her glowing face in keener admiration. "May I go for a walk with you again some morning? May I?"

She shook her head.

"Why not?" he pleaded, insistently. She thought the question in bad taste, and frowned a little even while she blushed in answering it.

"There is something so vulgar in an assignation, so unladylike!" she was explaining, when he interrupted.

"Yet you met me once!"

All the colour faded from her face, the frown deepened, and her lips tightened in a resolution not to reply.

How he had disenchanted her by his thoughtless reminder of an indiscretion she had already repented in the bitterness of sack-cloth and ashes, he never guessed, and went on in the same tone of persuasion he had adopted throughout.

"Won't you come, Miss Holt? I have so much, so very much, to say to you."

"I am afraid," she rejoined, stiffly. "You must try and say it here!"

Others joined them then, and it was impossible for him to ask an explanation of her altered demeanour.

Only a moment before she had smiled in his eyes, and lowered hers in beautiful confusion as she met his ardent gaze; now no statue could have seemed colder nor less impressionable to anything he could say or do. The lovely features might have been carved in stone; the whole attitude of her figure betokened a rigid determination—an intense scorn.

Once, for a moment, the white eyelids were raised as he spoke to someone else, and she surveyed him furtively.

Pleasant—very pleasant—was he to look upon: tall, strong, and unquestionably well-bred, with a manner that won for him many friends, a face on which the glances of more than a few women had rested with caressing tenderness.

The bright colours of his racing jacket showing through his open overcoat suited the rich olive of his complexion; the deep feeling that had been roused by his own words lent him an added comeliness—a manlier, more earnest expression; yet Judith concluded her rapid inspection with a sigh.

It was not the first time she had felt out of tune with him, yet on all other occasions she had been ready to believe that the discord might be in her own mind, or rather in her imagination; only now she felt so hopelessly jarred, and thought he could never be to her what she had sometimes fancied he might ultimately become.

From his pedestal he had fallen in a moment, and to look upon the sudden wreck was so painful that she was glad when Colonel Lea-Creagh came up and arrested her attention.

Not at once could she reconcile herself to the change, and become accustomed to the thought that her hero was a hero to her no more, but, in spite of his good looks, as ordinary a young man as ever played polo, or sought to please a woman's taste.

Nor could she in her first revulsion of feeling believe that it might be only momentary, and a reinstatement of her shattered idol still possible.

So slight a thing can turn one when hovering on the brink; while, when one has once passed over, no consideration however weighty could deter one from going on to the end—bitter-sweet as it might prove.

Captain St. Quentin's ill-judged remark was visited upon him too severely, perhaps; but it must be remembered that Judith's feelings were still in a state of transition, when it needed only a trifle to urge her forward, a trifle to restrain; and absence of tact meets often with heavier punishment than any vice.

In the meantime, Lea-Creagh, full of his fixed intention, drew close to Judith's side. Others were talking to her, but he had patience and persistence, so that after some ten minutes, during which he stood over her (like a beacon, warning others from the rock on which he had stranded), they found themselves alone.

Judith, never dreaming of the plans he had formed to alter for the better the circumstances of her life, was still looking in the direction towards which St. Quentin had moved away, with a vague sadness in her eyes of which she was not aware.

When the Colonel spoke she started, and brought her thoughts with an effort to the subject which he had chosen.

"I think," he began, valiantly, "a bachelor's life is the most wretched in the world."

"Is not that a very recent discovery?" laughing.

"If it is, that very reason lends it weight. The precepts that are taught us in our copy-books seem sound enough, and only a very bold spirit dare question them; but the truth one finds out for oneself is something more. It comes upon one as a revelation."

She looked questioningly in his face, more curious as to the cause of his earnestness than interested in the matter he was discussing.

"It is so easy for a man to deceive himself," he went on, "his own selfishness helps to persuade him that a life without trouble, without responsibilities, without ties, is preferable; until one day something pierces through the cloud of prejudices in which he has enwrapped himself; he knows the error under which he has been labouring and—explores it."

He was speaking well, and knew it; moreover, the faint sign of embarrassment that

became apparent in the girl's cheeks as she grew conscious to what all this was tending, encouraged him to proceed with a more passionate intonation.

"Everything seems nothing, any consideration mean, any thought of expediency unworthy, the closest interests small and insignificant when compared with love."

Of all the words in the English language perhaps that word "love," is the most difficult to pronounce with dignity or even without awkwardness, any unmeaning phrase is gladly substituted; "caring," "being fond of," "liking," all in turn being made to stand in lieu of it, and even these are brought out in shame-faced haste; so that Colonel Lea-Creagh deserved some credit for the decisive force with which he spoke.

Pity it was that the sudden involuntary glance his speech evoked should have lessened, if not entirely done away with, its effect.

His stout figure and placid, uninteresting face harmonised in no way with the meaning of his words; and Judith, with a little gasp of horror, made a movement to join Mrs. Sherston, who was standing near. He stopped her, and said, quickly,—

"Don't go, Miss Holt. What I have said has not been without intention. For some time now I have known that I could never be happy unless you were my wife. Have I any hope?"

"None; none!" she answered, vehemently, and stopped short, ashamed at the rudeness implied in her unhesitating reply. He had treated her with unvarying kindness, been gentlemanly and respectful always; certainly he had merited more consideration at her hands.

"I am very sorry," she said, with downcast eyes, "and I feel the compliment you have paid me. I do not think I shall ever marry; it is most unlikely, and—"

"There is someone else," he broke in, with an accent of what in a woman would have been called pettishness; but she was feeling too sad to rebuke him, and her voice faltered just a little, as she answered quietly,—

"There is no one—no one at all."

Merely saying so brought the tears into her eyes; even to herself her own case seemed a pitiable one, and she wondered if any of these gaily-dressed women who thronged past her just then to view the beginning of a race from the grand stand were in the same unhappy plight. Keenly she realised her womanhood, and that she was born to love and suffer as her sex had ever done since the days of Eve; and a tender yearning rose in her mind, unconnected with anyone in particular, that gave to her beautiful face something that it had formerly lacked—something that had been growing and gathering for weeks and weeks, but was only now gaining form and substance. She understood now all the beauty of a woman's weakness, and she began to doubt if her careless girlhood had been all happiness, whether there might not be trouble and unrest sweeter far than that untroubled calm.

Her intimacy with Laurence St. Quentin had been an undoubted pleasure, nor had she ever been quite blind to its possible consequences; yet it was only now she knew how near she had been to loving him, now, when for the first time it struck her that he might not be worthy of her love.

There was no anger in her heart against him, only an intense self-pity as she became conscious what an aching void there would be were she to banish him from her thoughts. Was anyone quite faultless? she asked herself in sudden rebellion against her own hard judgment; and would it not be better to let herself drift on as inclination tended?

They were standing near one of the jumps on the course; the race had started—a fact that both had been too absorbed to heed; but they were aroused by the clatter of horses' feet as four or five steeplechasers in close proximity to each other came on at a good pace.

(To be continued.)

BE HUMBLE.

—o—

Who glories in power? Who boasts of his might?
 Who worships his gold-heaps by day and by night?
 Who makes only vice-gilded pleasure his aim?
 Who strives only after the chaplet of fame?
 Vain mortal! Thy power and might must decay.
 Thy riches take wing and fly swiftly away!
 Thy dearly-bought pleasures be followed by pain,
 Thy wreath of renown prove unstable and vain!

What is this existence to which we all cling?
 It passes away like a bird on the wing.
 'Tis a breath, 'tis a vapour, 'tis a song, 'tis a sigh,
 We weep, we rejoice, we grow weary, we die!

And this ends the story—the babe of to-day
 Crowds out the grandsire who passes away;
 And the babe in its turn hurries on to the goal,
 Where death stands awaiting the flight of the soul.

Be humble, then, mortal, thou worm of the sod,
 And bend thy proud knee in contrition to God,
 Who only is mighty, who only can save,
 And whose smile can light up e'en the gloom of the grave.

Be humble, and patient, and ready to go
 Whenever thy mission is finished below;
 Then rest thee contented, no terror can come
 When God in His wisdom shall summon thee home. F. S.

GERDA'S SACRIFICE.

—o—

CHAPTER V.

ROSAMOND LESTRANGE had no cause to complain of her lover. No woman was ever wooed more passionately, more tenderly, than she. She was Reginald's first love, and on her the young man poured out all the affection of a heart which all his life had cherished but very few.

From the moment she wore his engagement ring Rex looked upon her as his own property. He would willingly have taken her off the stage at once; that being impossible, he was always at her side in her journeys to and fro the theatre, and surveyed her performance from a stage-box.

"At last!" he said, when the evening came which was to close for ever her career as an actress. "Rosamond, I wonder if you have the least idea how eagerly I have looked forward to to-night?"

She shivered. Perhaps the evening air fell on her too keenly. Rex thought so, and drew her heavy fur-lined cloak more closely round her.

"After to-night," he murmured, "you will be all my own; no one else will have any share in you after to-night."

Something in the decision of his tone struck her.

"Rex," she whispered, gently, "I am not like you; I have not your firm, strong will. I am weak and yielding. Promise me you will never despise me."

"I could not," he answered, quickly. "I could not even if I tried. Rosamond, don't you understand? To me you are just what your name implies—Rose of the World."

She looked into his eyes, and her own sank beneath their gaze.

"And you won't get tired?"

"Of you? Never! Rome, is it possible you are afraid of me, my darling?"

"A little."

"You must not be. Oh, Rosamond! will a day ever dawn when you love me as I love you?"

She did not answer.

They were at the theatre, and Rex went in front with a strange uneasiness at his heart. He loved this beautiful actress as his own life, but he never felt sure of her. How could he put faith in her, when, with her own lips, she confessed she had no love to give him?

It was the last night of a popular drama, but Reginald paid little attention to the play—he saw but one face, heard but one voice. Truly, he had taken love's fever badly.

The play was over at last.

Rosamond, cloaked and shawled, took his arm as he led her to the waiting cab.

For a little time neither spoke. Then the girl said wistfully,—

"I feel so strange, Rex! Only fancy, I shall never go there again!—never again!"

"Are you sorry?"

"Just a little," in a kind of choked voice. "Don't be angry, Rex! I can't help it; it seems as if my old life were all gone from me, and I stood on a narrow plank leading to the new!"

"The new shall be happier, Rose, if love can make it so! Rosamond Travers! it is a pretty name!"

"Yes, I like the name of Rosamond."

"Was it your mother's?"

A hot flush dyed her cheek.

"Oh, no!"

"I ought not to have asked; I forgot that she was dead. My darling, you stand terribly alone in the world; but you shall never feel your loneliness after Monday."

He lingered at the door of the bijou villa.

"You will come upstairs?" she said, gently.

"Are you not tired?"

"I could not sleep. My brain feels on fire. You had better come and talk to me, Rex. At least you will prevent me from thinking."

"And is thought painful?" as he followed her.

"Maddening!"

He closed the door of the sitting-room. Crossing over to her side he took her hand.

"Rosamond," he cried, passionately, "what did you mean by that? Sweetheart, do you regret your promise?"

"No."

"Then why can thought be maddening?"

She blushed.

"It is all so strange," she murmured, "so wonderful. But a little time ago I had never seen your face. How marvellous it is, that I, the humble actress, should be the bride of an English Earl!"

He was reassured.

"You will be the loveliest countess in England."

A timid knock at the door, and the maid, servant entered; she knew the state of affairs between Miss Lestrangle and her visitor, and looked distressed at disturbing them.

"Oh! if you please miss," to Rosamond, "a man brought a telegram here for Mr. Travers; it was very urgent, and so they sent it over from his lodgings, thinking he was here."

Rosamond took the despatch and placed it in her lover's hand.

"Do you feel frightened, Rex?"

"Why should I?"

"Receiving a telegram always terrifies me."

He smiled.

"All I prize is in this room, Rosamond; while you are safe and well nothing can touch me very much—nothing in the world!"

He held the despatch in his hand as though he did not care to examine into its contents; but his betrothed had more curiosity.

"Open it, Rex. I am longing to know what can be the matter."

"Guess," he said, mischievously.

"Your uncle has heard of your infatuation, meaning me, and written to order you to put a stop to it."

"He might write, he'd never get half his arguments into a telegram; besides, Lord Castleton is perfectly indifferent to my actions, so long as I keep at a safe distance from himself."

"Open it," she said again.

He tore open the envelope and took out the message it had secured; only one single line, but what a marvellous change it wrought in his position.

"Your uncle is dead, come at once!"

"Oh! Rex!"

She had been looking over his shoulder and read the message; her face lit up with triumph.

"You are Earl of Castleton!"

He smiled.

"Even so; my wife will not have to wait long for her coronet. Rosamond, what is to be done? I cannot go to Yorkshire and return for Monday! How are we to manage, darling? I will telegraph to the butler and tell him to use his own discretion in arranging things. I cannot, will not, leave you!"

"You had better go," she said, prudently.

"And leave you?"

"It can't be helped. We shall have our lives to spend together, Rex!"

"I can't bear to leave you, Rosamond. Let me make you my own—let me give you my name, and leave the Countess of Castleton to await my return from Yorkshire!"

"Do you doubt me?"

"Doubt you? No! but I may be detained days and days. Rose, I come of a superstitious family; surely you know that nothing in the world is so unlucky as to put off a wedding!"

Miss Lestrangle had reasons of her own for fearing delay—reasons for wishing to be a countess as soon as might be. Their wedding was fixed for Monday, at eleven; by advancing this time two hours and a half the ceremony might take place, and the new Earl proceed afterwards to his inheritance. Rosamond did not suggest this; she gave a faint hint, and Rex proposed the plan himself; then, after a little hesitation, she agreed.

"Half past eight," she said, laughing, "on a December morning—that a sight I shall look!"

"You could not look anything but beautiful! Rose, do you indeed consent?"

"But afterwards?" she suggested. "I could not come back here alone."

"I would not let you. To-morrow I will write and engage rooms at the Langham Hotel, and as soon as possible I will come from Yorkshire and rejoin my wife."

"But the clergyman, Rex. What will he say to a wedding at half past eight?"

Mr. Travers undertook to settle that; then having been forbidden to present himself at his fiancée's the next day, he took leave of her, knowing they should meet next before Heaven's altar to swear the most solemn vows man and woman can make to each other!

The matter was settled easily. A very liberal present to the clerk, a frank statement that the death of a near relation made them anxious to dispense with all festivities, and the ceremony was fixed for half-past eight.

Rex had little sleep that Sunday night. He rose before it was light, and reached the church while the clerk was in the act of unfastening the massive doors. It was a very gloomy edifice; the atmosphere had a damp, musty smell, and, in spite of the fact that it was presumably warmed the day before, it was intensely cold. Rex absolutely shivered as he stood anxiously awaiting his bride.

She came alone. In most private weddings the bride and groom arrive together, or there is at least a female friend with the former. Rosamond was perfectly alone; she wore a charming toilette of ruby velvet, a small toque-like hat of the same sat lightly on her golden hair. She was more beautiful, if possible, than Rex had ever seen her.

The service began. Reginald was eager and impatient, his bride composed and quiet;

couch. "I was telling Winifred that she had no spirit."

"I like her best without. In a sweetheart might amuse one, perhaps, and certainly could not alarm; but one would wish one's wife to be amenable to discipline."

He spoke calmly, but with decision; and by a threatened touch upon her arm forced Judith to stand aside, taking a seat close to where Winifred lay.

"You would prefer to please me, would you not?" he asked, looking down at her with almost a mocking look in his cruel near-sight eyes.

"Have I not proved it?" she counter-questioned, in a low voice, crimsoning painfully as she met his glance.

Taking her unresisting fingers he pressed them lightly against his lips before he turned to Judith.

"You see we understand each other," he observed with triumphant malice. Too indignant to reply, she turned and left the room, while again that unvoiced craving for aid, the support of a man's strong arm and intellect, came over her. It was strange that the form which in her mind became associated with that yearning was not that of the lover who that very day had almost succeeded in winning ascendancy over her heart, but that of the cousin who was thousands of miles away, and perhaps long ere this had reconciled himself to the position of rejected suitor. It was not St. Quentin's handsome face with the passionate light in his blue eyes, as she had seen him last, but Avon's steadfast gaze, when smothering his own feelings he smiled bravely as he bade her farewell, that seemed to come before her and convince her of her helplessness, standing as she did alone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FALSE OR TRUE.

THE Commissioner's office stood in his compound, only the tennis courts intervening between it and the flower-beds that were arranged round the portico of the front door. From the drawing room windows there was an uninterrupted view of the building, so that Judith, standing there the following morning, could not help noting the unusual sight of a lady walking up to the entrance and being instantly admitted. Even a momentary glance determined it to be Mrs. Trevor, for not only did she habitually affect white in her garments and large straw hats that her detractors were fond of declaring would have been more suitable to a woman half her age, but she had a tripping gait that could not easily be mistaken; and Judith felt some uneasiness as to whether the visit would not prove to be connected with the appeal she had made the day before, wishing earnestly that she had taken the precaution of extracting a pledge of secrecy when she spoke.

If this were indeed so—if the knowledge she possessed were to be betrayed to Mr. Sherston, and through him to the very man it was most necessary to keep in the dark on the subject—then all her schemes would be in vain, for forewarned in this case would be forearmed.

He would hurry on the marriage, and thus render futile all her attempts to collect proofs; for whatever happened, and however great her own cause for wrath, she could never avenge herself on Winifred's husband. This he would guess, and was certainly not above trading on the fact. She was aroused from her disturbed thoughts by a convulsive grip upon her arm.

It was Mrs. Sherston, who had been standing there some time, but who only now put in words the question that had been burning on her lips.

"Who was it?" she asked, her sharp-featured face looking more than ordinarily stern from the repression of emotion that she felt.

"It was Mrs. Trevor," answered Judith.

Mrs. Sherston relinquished her grasp, and moved away. Judith thought that she had left the room, but when she turned to look round presently she saw her sitting in her usual chair with some embroidery in her hand, which she seemed to be working with her ordinary precision. She became conscious of Judith's glance at once.

"Don't go away, Miss Holt, if you have nothing particular to do. Watch there, and let me know when Mrs. Trevor leaves. I have something to say to her."

Wondering a little at the request, yet glad on her own account to discover whether this were merely a friendly visit, or with a serious object referring to herself and her unfortunate application, Judith obeyed. So, for nearly an hour, she stood and waited, while in the centre of the room Mrs. Sherston counted her stitches slowly in a phlegmatic tone, meant to assure the hearer of her own perfect indifference to what was going on.

Then Mrs. Trevor left, emerging as she had entered—alone; and Judith, too, moved from her point of espionage.

"She is going. Shall I run out and call her myself, or send a servant?" she asked.

"Do neither. It does not matter. I can write a note," was the curt rejoinder, the work still progressing, and with apparently deep attention lavished on it.

But when Judith went out the needle dropped from her fingers; and her watch, which had several times been stealthily consulted, was again drawn from her belt, while a quick frown contracted her brows as she saw how long a period had elapsed.

It is a mistake to suppose jealousy only a folly of youth. No time in life can its pangs be so acute as when reason can give no comforting assurance, and faith must rest poised on her own divine wings, with no foundation for her feet on earth.

A woman's empire, depending chiefly on charms that the years destroy, is at best a very short one; and if unhappily she has not managed during that brief season to rivet the chains, which then are easily forged, with a strength calculated to endure, even when the brightness of metal has ceased to dazzle and delight, she can hope little from after efforts.

When Mrs. Sherston married it had been without love, and from the first she had only endeavoured to influence her husband's actions in so far as they concerned herself, and her small ambitions; not attempting to gain a firm hold on his affections.

She had been bright and amusing in those days—a good dancer, a beautiful rider, and had not lacked admirers; but afterwards, when bad health robbed her of her good looks, and had accentuated the sharpness of repartee into actual ill-nature, these failed her, and she turned naturally to the man she had married for his society and sympathy.

Then it was, with something more than mere discomfiture, she realised that the slight fancy he had had for her—born of pique and wounded pride—had been utterly destroyed by her indifference, and that it would never be revived, his thoughts having in the meantime drifted back into their old channel.

The only woman he had ever loved, yet whom, from loyalty to his brother, he had voluntarily renounced, had also married in the interval, and perhaps, had she been happy in her choice he would more easily have resigned himself to the inevitable; but John Trevor was by no means a pattern sponse, and clung to the habits of his bachelorhood from the very outset, never allowing a thought of his young wife to restrain him from indulgence in any favourite pursuit.

Nearly all the leave he could procure he spent in Cashmere, penetrating into the wilds beyond Yarkund and Leh, so that even had she been inclined she could scarcely have accompanied him; while even in cantonments his leisure hours were mostly occupied in playing racquets or polo, and for the last year

he had been in Burmah, having volunteered as transport officer for duty.

Since their parting, twenty-three years before, the Commissioner and Lillian Trevor had not met until some eighteen months ago, chance had once again thrown them in the same station.

The time that had elapsed and the changes which that time had brought might reasonably be supposed to have done away with all question of danger in the meeting; but Mrs. Sherston's jealousy, having considered all this while, burst into sudden flame on being confronted with her rival.

Carefully disguising her real feelings, she embarked at once into a sort of patronising friendship for the flighty, yet not ill-intentioned grass-widow, and lost no opportunity of flaunting her prosperity before her gaze.

To every elaborate entertainment she was invariably bidden, as well as to the more unceremonious parties which were given; but up to this date Mrs. Sherston had never succeeded in discovering any sign or symptom of intimacy between her and her husband.

So far as she knew, and in the matter she had been Argus-eyed, they had never exchanged a syllable in private.

This deliberate seeking of him in his office staggered her from its very audacity, and she was at a loss how to circumvent such a daring move, startled, too, to find how deeply she herself was concerned therewith.

Nor was Mr. Sherston less surprised when raising his eyes from a paper in which he had been earnestly engrossed he beheld before him the woman whom he had loved all his life, but from whom he had been divided more absolutely by the canons of conventionality than by any barriers of distance.

While he rose awkwardly from his chair and with a vanity of which he was scarcely conscious removed his pince-nez, the red-coated *chuprassie* who had ushered her in withdrew, leaving them alone.

She stood there, hesitating how to explain to him the reason of her visit, and a warm blush mounting to her face made it look quite young and pretty in the shadow of her big hat.

Even had his sight been clearer than it was he would have seen no lines about the mouth that once he had so fondly kissed, no wrinkles round the eyes that had once looked such tenderness into his own.

A charm was over him for the moment, and he could not help fancying that all that had happened in his life since they parted in anger was a dream, and he need only now concern himself about the reality of her presence. At a word he would have thrown himself at her feet and declared himself unchanged, in spite of all that had passed.

But she did not share the enthusiasm of his delusion, was not even conscious of it.

In her own case a strenuous, constant effort to appear young, not entirely disdaining the aid of art, might help to deceive him for the moment; but there was nothing in the tall, thin and elderly man who waited, glasses in hand, for her to speak, to remind her of the young lover who had wooed her so ardently, renounced her so remorselessly, years ago.

"You must think it very strange, my coming here," she began.

He handed her a chair, and with somewhat stilted politeness assured her she was welcome, that he would be only too happy to serve her in any way.

"You mistake," she interrupted, quickly. "I would not ask your help if I were dying! It was to help you, to warn you of a threatened danger, I came here."

He went over to the door, which still stood ajar, and closed it carefully; then returning sat down in his former place, prepared to listen to what she had to say.

When Judith first mentioned Straghan's name he had expected more to follow, though then no definite fear was in his mind as to the knowledge she might possess. Now he felt it

had only been the beginning of the end—the first faint cloud that might spread and darken his whole horizon.

He was not surprised, nor did he move a muscle of his face, as Mr. Trevor went on,—"I have always known that Mr. Johnson was no other than your old clerk, Michael Stranghan, the man who absconded to escape an inquiry that was being raised then—the Cheshire bethery case, you know. I recognised him at once; but so long as it was only I who knew it did not matter, for I would not betray you!"

Even in his keen anxiety to know what other hold this weapon against him he could not help being thrilled by the tone of her voice as it rang out clear and musical in her conversation.

For the moment the identity of the Mrs. Trevor he had met in friendly intercourse for the last eighteen months was submerged in that of Lillian Grey he had not seen for twenty-three years. So she had protested then her love and truth, and he had not believed her.

"Who else knows?" he asked, feeling the necessity of putting away from him the folly of such thoughts, and almost relieved to find that in asking the question his interest in the answer intensified and grew.

"Miss Holt, your daughter's companion. She came to me and asked me to support her in a charge against Mr. Johnson. I refused to do so."

"Why?"

"Because it would have injured you. Even at the time of that inquiry there were some who said that if Stranghan were guilty you must have been implicated too; and if it were known that he were under your roof now, bearing an assumed name, an honoured guest and engaged to marry your daughter, those vague suspicions which were rife then would become certainties."

She kept her face turned away from him, not wishing to see him wince beneath her words. Though she had judged it better to say out the whole truth at once she could not harden herself to look upon his shame; the memory of the old days was too present with her then.

Indeed, I doubt if a woman can ever divest the man she once loved of the halo which that love cast round him; and despite the love of pleasure, the craving for admiration which had become to her a second nature, Lillian Trevor was at heart a very woman still. She could never quite forget the one romance of her otherwise frivolous lifetime.

The Commissioner had become ahen gray in his pallor; no one knew better than he that once an accusation is breathed, ever so lightly, it only takes a little time for it to become substantiated, and the idea that a secret known to two women could remain a secret long he would have laughed to scorn. Yet just then he could not concentrate his thoughts on the danger of his own position, so strong was his curiosity to account for her action in the matter.

Was it from a tardy desire to atone for the past she came now and warned him of the threatened blow; or had she been moved by mere womanly caprice, a desire to have some influence upon his fate?

"And why?" he began, falteringly, then broke off altogether. But she understood what was in his mind.

"Why have I interfered? Why am I here? I wonder if you will believe me now when I tell you that it is because I loved you years ago, though then you doubted, and thought I cared for your money, your position."

"And did you not?" he asked, but had the grace to look ashamed when she flashed upon him a quick, scornful glance.

"It is scarcely worth while making protestations now, and yet all these years I have been longing for an opportunity of proving to you that I loved you for yourself, that for no other reason would I have jilted your brother."

"So you told me once before."

The accent of hesitation in his tone she

answered by drawing out Gerald Sherston's letter from her pocket, and placing it in his hand, watching him read it, not speaking until, with trembling fingers, he laid it on the table beside him. Then she explained.

"It was Miss Holt brought it to me yesterday. Chance has thrown them together, and, at his advice, she asked my aid. You see he offers me a strong inducement to help her in saying that it will be a reparation for the injury he suffered at my hands. How deep that injury was you know. It is possible you have seen him lately. I saw him only a short time ago, and could guess something of what he had gone through in the cruel lines upon his face. He was terribly changed—terribly!"

"Poor Jerry!" interpolated the Commissioner, sadly.

Perhaps she did not hear, for she went on quickly,—

"You know if I am very hard-hearted. I think even if you doubted the motive of my act you never doubted that I was repentant when I heard how it affected him, and of what madness it was the cause. You remember I was very ill, and for long long afterwards his face haunted me; even in sleep I could not escape the memory of it, for I knew it was I who had wrecked his life, I who was responsible for his wretchedness and guilt. This letter came as a great temptation. Always I had prayed that some day I might be able to atone, and when the chance came—I let it go by. Stronger than my desire to please him was the wish to show you beyond dispute that it was you I loved always, only you. Do you believe it now?"

"Yes, I believe you," he said, sadly, with not a trace of exultation in his tone.

After all, what did it matter at this period of their lives whether she had been true to him or no? He almost believed he would have preferred to think her false still than be weighed down by the thought that, but for his own incredulity, they might have been together all these years, happy notwithstanding the gloomy shadow which the misfortune of another must have thrown over both.

"You cannot blame me," he said, querulously. "You had deceived me once in not telling me you were engaged to my own brother; it was not to be wondered at that when I heard the truth I should think you had deceived me doubly, that for mercenary reasons, not for love, you had allowed me to supplant poor Jerry."

"I never blamed you. I think I liked you all the better for your loyalty to him. But I am glad you know the truth now."

She rose slowly from her seat as she spoke. The colour which excitement had brought to her face had faded and her face looked pinched and worn. It was far easier for the Commissioner to realise the flight of time now than it had been on her first entrance, when the momentary glow had made her look more youthful, and he was taken by surprise.

"May I keep this?" he asked, soberly, tapping the letter with his fingers.

"It is no good to me. What shall you do in the matter?"

"I hardly know; it is difficult to decide what is best. Do you know what animus that girl has against Mr. Johnson?"

"She is only anxious to prevent his marriage with Winifred. If the engagement were broken off I believe he would have nothing to fear from her."

He sighed, and passed his hand with a gesture of utter weariness through his hair; and so deeply was she moved to pity that she crossed over to his side, and her fingers closed with a tight, warm pressure over his as they lay upon the table.

"I am very sorry for you. I wish you well through it all!" she murmured indistinctly, looking down with infinite compassion into his thin face, on which anxiety had worn more lines than age.

With mute gratitude he returned her gaze, feeling that it would be impossible to say out all that was in his heart, and certainly unwise.

The caress had recalled old tendernesses the memory of which made him yearn as he had never done before for womanly sympathy and love; at the same time a keen remorse filled him for the injustice he had inflicted on her, while admiring the patience with which she had suffered it and completely vindicated herself at last.

His sight was dimmed with an unwept moisture, and, as he lifted his hand to clear it, he passed from the room with an almost inaudible "good-bye."

When he looked up again she was gone, the door closed behind her; his eyes fell listlessly upon a frame on his writing-table that contained the portrait of his wife, hard-featured and cold, in spite of the self-complacent smile which, for the occasion, she had adopted; and so marked was the contrast between what "might have been" and what unhappily was, that out of the very bitterness of his soul he laughed aloud.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A QUESTION OF LOVE.

THERE comes a time in the life of every man when the pleasures of his bachelor life seem to pall; and, however brilliant may have been the existence he has led, it appears stale and profitless in comparison with purer, if more conventional, domestic joys.

In Colonel Lea-Cragh's case this crisis had been very long in coming. He had always prided himself on being a butterfly, and impervious to the attractions that young girls possessed for some, but not for him. No; Byron himself felt more scorn of the prettiness of the bread-and-butter type than did he; moreover, he had had some reason to plume himself upon the conquests he had made of quite as pretty, and more piquante, older women. Not always had he been so, as he was now, corpulent and pompous; there had been a time when he was as popular as any officer in the mounted arm of the service, when he had been able to depend completely on his personal attributes, and needed not his other recommendations of money and a good position.

That he had not realised when this time was over was an error, and no uncommon one. Can any one deliberately decide when their own youth is past, when their own good looks are waning? It is seldom indeed that the date is not fixed at a considerably later period than others would have fixed it for us.

But latterly Lea-Cragh had experienced some faint misgivings on this subject. It may have been that his patent admiration for Judith made him less warmly welcomed by other women; but certainly he found them more unwilling to be monopolised by him, more chary, too, of accepting his presents—for he was naturally generous to a fault, and may have also found it diplomatic to supplement his attentions with more solid advantages. However this might have been, his fears were aroused—the dread of a lonely, old age constantly recurring, and spoiling his delight in the good things that were still at his disposal. He pictured himself a superannuated bachelor about town, with none of the prestige that now surrounded him as colonel of a crack cavalry corps; and a vision of the life that might be his were Judith to become his wife seemed even more alluring by the contrast. To do him justice, he was also honestly fond of the girl—honestly desirous of rescuing her from the dependent position in which he guessed she was not happy, and by giving her all that he possessed brightening her lot.

It was not till the day of their interview with Gerald Sherston that any definite intention of asking her to marry him was formed in his mind; but the more he thought the matter out, the more convinced he became that it would be for the happiness of both.

were the idea to be consummated, and his fascination grew.

The next time he saw her they were at a gymkhana, she listening, with what the Colonel thought considerable eagerness, to Captain St. Quentin as he talked to her.

That their conversation was about the races he did not doubt, and was conscious of some twinges of regret that he himself had no knowledge on the subject.

In spite of his profession, and though his name was enrolled as a matter of course among the stewards at every local meeting, he was by no means a horsey man—scarcely, indeed, knew one pony from another, and had hitherto been sufficiently brave to avow the fact.

Now, for the first time, he felt his deficiencies in this respect as he noted her evident interest, and the quick gaze with which she followed the ponies as they cantered along the course.

Captain St. Quentin was the owner of several racers, one of which he was riding in a steeplechase, and wore his silk jacket underneath a light overcoat.

"I wish I could ride them all, but I am too heavy," he was saying to his companion, while Judith looked vaguely sympathetic, not quite comprehending how far it was a case for pity.

Winifred's little terrier was seated, on his hind legs, waving his paws with the desolate air of one who finds himself alone in a crowd.

Several times he had been made to leave his mistress by main force; and though when actually away he enjoyed the running about, he did so under protest, and never of his own free will would leave the sick room.

Now, with a low whine, he called attention to his hard fate, and Judith took a biscuit from a tray that was handed to her by a kit-matgar with tea and coffee, and gave it to him in bits.

"He is so miserable now Winifred is ill, and won't leave her for a moment if he can help it. Poor little Dandy!" she said, and stooping stroked his long, white, silky hair.

"I wish you would bestow your pity elsewhere; it is sorely needed! Are you never sorry for me? That day after day I can never see you nor speak to you, though I manoeuvre all I know."

"It was only the other day—" she began. "A week ago!" he interrupted, scornfully, and his eloquent blue eyes rested on her glowing face in keenest admiration. "May I go for a walk with you again some morning? May I?"

She shook her head.

"Why not?" he pleaded, insistently.

She thought the question in bad taste, and frowned a little even while she blushed in answering it.

"There is something so vulgar in an assignation, so unladylike!" she was explaining, when he interrupted.

"Yet you met me once!"

All the colour faded from her face, the frown deepened, and her lips tightened in a resolution not to reply.

How he had disenchanted her by his thoughtless reminder of an indiscretion she had already repented in the bitterness of sackcloth and ashes, he never guessed, and went on in the same tone of persuasion he had adopted throughout,—

"Won't you come, Miss Holt? I have so much, so very much, to say to you."

"I am afraid," she rejoined, stiffly. "You must try and say it here!"

Others joined them then, and it was impossible for him to ask an explanation of her altered demeanour.

Only a moment before she had smiled in his eyes, and lowered hers in beautiful confusion as she met his ardent gaze; now no statue could have seemed colder nor less impressionable to anything he could say or do. The lovely features might have been carved in stone; the whole attitude of her figure betokened a rigid determination—an intense scorn.

Once, for a moment, the white eyelids were raised as he spoke to someone else, and she surveyed him furtively.

Pleasant—very pleasant—was he to look upon: tall, strong, and unquestionably well-bred, with a manner that won for him many friends, a face on which the glances of more than a few women had rested with caressing tenderness.

The bright colours of his racing jacket showing through his open overcoat suited the rich olive of his complexion; the deep feeling that had been roused by his own words lent him an added comeliness—a manlier, more earnest expression; yet Judith concluded her rapid inspection with a sigh.

It was not the first time she had felt out of tune with him, yet on all other occasions she had been ready to believe that the discord might be in her own mind, or rather in her imagination; only now she felt so hopelessly jarred, and thought he could never be to her what she had sometimes fancied he might ultimately become.

From his pedestal he had fallen in a moment, and to look upon the sudden wreck was so painful that she was glad when Colonel Lea-Creagh came up and arrested her attention.

Not at once could she reconcile herself to the change, and become accustomed to the thought that her hero was a hero to her no more, but, in spite of his good looks, as ordinary a young man as ever played polo, or sought to please a woman's taste.

Nor could she in her first revulsion of feeling believe that it might be only momentary, and a reinstatement of her shattered idol still possible.

So slight a thing can turn one when hovering on the brink; while, when one has once passed over, no consideration however weighty could deter one from going on to the end—bitter-sweet as it might prove.

Captain St. Quentin's ill-judged remark was visited upon him too severely, perhaps; but it must be remembered that Judith's feelings were still in a state of transition, when it needed only a trifle to urge her forward, a trifle to restrain; and absence of tact meets often with heavier punishment than any vice.

In the meantime, Lea-Creagh, full of his fixed intention, drew close to Judith's side. Others were talking to her, but he had patience and persistence, so that after some ten minutes, during which he stood over her (like a beacon, warning others from the rock on which he had stranded), they found themselves alone.

Judith, never dreaming of the plans he had formed to alter for the better the circumstances of her life, was still looking in the direction towards which St. Quentin had moved away, with a vague sadness in her eyes of which she was not aware.

When the Colonel spoke she started, and brought her thoughts with an effort to the subject which he had chosen.

"I think," he began, valiantly, "a bachelor's life is the most wretched in the world."

"Is not that a very recent discovery?" laughing.

"If it is, that very reason lends it weight. The precepts that are taught us in our copy-books seem sound enough, and only a very bold spirit dare question them; but the truth one finds out for oneself is something more. It comes upon one as a revelation."

She looked questioningly in his face, more curious as to the cause of his earnestness than interested in the matter he was discussing.

"It is so easy for a man to deceive himself," he went on, "his own selfishness helps to persuade him that a life without trouble, without responsibilities, without ties, is preferable; until one day something pierces through the cloud of prejudices in which he has enwrapped himself; he knows the error under which he has been labouring and—deplores it."

He was speaking well, and knew it; moreover, the faint sign of embarrassment that

became apparent in the girl's cheeks as she grew conscious to what all this was tending, encouraged him to proceed with a more passionate intonation,—

"Everything seems nothing, any consideration mean, any thought of expediency unworthy, the closest interests small and insignificant when compared with love."

Of all the words in the English language perhaps that word "love," is the most difficult to pronounce with dignity or even without awkwardness, any unmeaning phrase is gladly substituted; "caring," "being fond of," "liking," all in turn being made to stand in lieu of it, and even these are brought out in shame-faced haste; so that Colonel Lea-Creagh deserved some credit for the decisive force with which he spoke.

Pity it was that the sudden involuntary glance his speech evoked should have lessened, if not entirely done away with, its effect.

His stout figure and placid, uninteresting face harmonised in no way with the meaning of his words; and Judith, with a little gasp of horror, made a movement to join Mrs. Sherston, who was standing near. He stopped her, and said, quickly,—

"Don't go, Miss Holt. What I have said has not been without intention. For some time now I have known that I could never be happy unless you were my wife. Have I any hope?"

"None; none!" she answered, vehemently, and stopped short, ashamed at the rudeness implied in her unhesitating reply. He had treated her with unvarying kindness, been gentlemanly and respectful always; certainly he had merited more consideration at her hands.

"I am very sorry," she said, with downcast eyes, "and I feel the compliment you have paid me. I do not think I shall ever marry; it is most unlikely, and—"

"There is someone else," he broke in, with an accent of what in a woman would have been called pettishness; but she was feeling too sad to rebuke him, and her voice faltered just a little, as she answered quietly,—

"There is no one—no one at all."

Merely saying so brought the tears into her eyes; even to herself her own case seemed a pitiable one, and she wondered if any of these gaily-dressed women who thronged past her just then to view the beginning of a race from the grand stand were in the same unhappy plight. Keenly she realised her womanhood, and that she was born to love and suffer as her sex had ever done since the days of Eve; and a tender yearning rose in her mind, unconnected with anyone in particular, that gave to her beautiful face something that it had formerly lacked—something that had been growing and gathering for weeks and weeks, but was only now gaining form and substance. She understood now all the beauty of a woman's weakness, and she began to doubt if her careless girlhood had been all happiness, whether there might not be trouble and unrest sweeter far than that untroubled calm.

Her intimacy with Laurence St. Quentin had been an undoubted pleasure, nor had she ever been quite blind to its possible consequences; yet it was only now she knew how near she had been to loving him, now, when for the first time it struck her that he might not be worthy of her love.

There was no anger in her heart against him, only an intense self-pity as she became conscious what an aching void there would be were she to banish him from her thoughts. Was anyone quite faultless? she asked herself in sudden rebellion against her own hard judgment; and would it not be better to let herself drift on as inclination tended?

They were standing near one of the jumps on the course; the race had started—a fact that both had been too absorbed to heed; but they were aroused by the clatter of horses' feet as four or five steeplechasers in close proximity to each other came on at a good pace.

(To be continued.)

BE HUMBLE.

-o-

Who glories in power? Who boasts of his might?

Who worships his gold-heaps by day and by night?

Who makes only vice-gilded pleasure his aim? Who strives only after the chaplet of fame?

Vain mortal! Thy power and might must decay.

Thy riches take wing and fly swiftly away! Thy dearly-bought pleasures be followed by pain.

Thy wreath of renown prove unstable and vain!

What is this existence to which we all cling? It passes away like a bird on the wing.

'Tis a breath, 'tis a vapour, 'tis a song, 'tis a sigh,

We weep, we rejoice, we grow weary, we die!

And this ends the story—the babe of to-day
Crowds out the grandsire who passes away;
And the babe in its turn hurries on to the goal.

Where death stands awaiting the flight of the soul.

Be humble, then, mortal, thou worm of the sod,

And bend thy proud knees in contrition to God,
Who only is mighty, who only can save,
And whose smile can light up e'en the gloom of the grave.

Be humble, and patient, and ready to go
Whenever thy mission is finished below;
Then rest thee contented, no terror can come
When God in His wisdom shall summon thee home.

F. S.

GERDA'S SACRIFICE.

-o-

CHAPTER V.

ROSAMOND LESTRANGE had no cause to complain of her lover. No woman was ever wooed more passionately, more tenderly, than she. She was Reginald's first love, and on her the young man poured out all the affection of a heart which all his life had cherished but very few.

From the moment she wore his engagement ring Rex looked upon her as his own property. He would willingly have taken her off the stage at once; that being impossible, he was always at her side in her journeys to and fro the theatre, and surveyed her performance from a stage-box.

"At last!" he said, when the evening came which was to close for ever her career as an actress. "Rosamond, I wonder if you have the least idea how eagerly I have looked forward to to-night?"

She shivered. Perhaps the evening air fell on her too keenly. Rex thought so, and drew her heavy fur-lined cloak more closely round her.

"After to-night," he murmured, "you will be all my own; no one else will have any share in you after to-night."

Something in the decision of his tone struck her.

"Rex," she whispered, gently, "I am not like you; I have not your firm, strong will. I am weak and yielding. Promise me you will never despise me."

"I could not," he answered, quickly. "I could not even if I tried. Rosamond, don't you understand? To me you are just what your name implies—Rose of the World."

She looked into his eyes, and her own sank beneath their gaze.

"And you won't get tired?"

"Of you? Never! Rose, is it possible you are afraid of me, my darling?"

"A little."

"You must not be. Oh, Rosamond! will a day ever dawn when you love me as I love you?"

She did not answer.

They were at the theatre, and Rex went in front with a strange uneasiness at his heart. He loved this beautiful actress as his own life, but he never felt sure of her. How could he put faith in her, when, with her own lips, she confessed she had no love to give him?

It was the last night of a popular drama, but Reginald paid little attention to the play—he saw but one face, heard but one voice. Truly, he had taken love's fever badly.

The play was over at last.

Rosamond, cloaked and shawled, took his arm as he led her to the waiting cab.

For a little time neither spoke. Then the girl said wistfully,—

"I feel so strange, Rex! Only fancy, I shall never go there again!—never again!"

"Are you sorry?"

"Just a little," in a kind of choked voice. "Don't be angry, Rex! I can't help it; it seems as if my old life were all gone from me, and I stood on a narrow plank leading to the new!"

"The new shall be happier, Rose, if love can make it so! Rosamond Travers! it is a pretty name!"

"Yes, I like the name of Rosamond."

"Was it your mother's?"

A hot flush dyed her cheek.

"Oh, no!"

"I ought not to have asked; I forgot that she was dead. My darling, you stand terribly alone in the world; but you shall never feel your loneliness after Monday."

He lingered at the door of the bijou villa.

"You will come upstairs?" she said, gently.

"Are you not tired?"

"I could not sleep. My brain feels on fire. You had better come and talk to me, Rex. At least you will prevent me from thinking."

"And is thought painful?" as he followed her.

"Maddening!"

He closed the door of the sitting-room. Crossing over to her side he took her hand.

"Rosamond," he cried, passionately, "what did you mean by that? Sweetheart, do you regret your promise?"

"No."

"Then why can thought be maddening?" She blushed.

"It is all so strange," she murmured, "so wonderful. But a little time ago I had never seen your face. How marvellous it is, that I, the humble actress, should be the bride of an English Earl!"

He was reassured.

"You will be the loveliest countess in England."

A timid knock at the door, and the maid, servant entered; she knew the state of affairs between Miss Lestrangle and her visitor, and looked distressed at disturbing them.

"Oh! if you please miss," to Rosamond, "a man brought a telegram here for Mr. Travers; it was very urgent, and so they sent it over from his lodgings, thinking he was here."

Rosamond took the despatch and placed it in her lover's hand.

"Do you feel frightened, Rex?"

"Why should I?"

"Receiving a telegram always terrifies me."

He smiled.

"All I prize is in this room, Rosamond; while you are safe and well nothing can touch me very much—nothing in the world!"

He held the despatch in his hand as though he did not care to examine into its contents; but his betrothed had more curiosity.

"Open it, Rex. I am longing to know what can be the matter."

"Guess," he said, mischievously.

"Your uncle has heard of your infatuation, meaning me, and written to order you to put a stop to it."

"He might write, he'd never get half his arguments into a telegram; besides, Lord Castleton is perfectly indifferent to my actions, so long as I keep at a safe distance from himself."

"Open it," she said again.

He tore open the envelope and took out the message it had secured; only one single line, but what a marvellous change it wrought in his position.

"Your uncle is dead, come at once!"

"Oh! Rex."

She had been looking over his shoulder and read the message; her face lit up with triumph.

"You are Earl of Castleton!"

He smiled.

"Even so; my wife will not have to wait long for her coronet. Rosamond, what is to be done? I cannot go to Yorkshire and return for Monday! How are we to manage, darling? I will telegraph to the butler and tell him to use his own discretion in arranging things. I cannot, will not, leave you!"

"You had better go," she said, prudently.

"And leave you?"

"It can't be helped. We shall have our lives to spend together, Rex!"

"I can't bear to leave you, Rosamond. Let me make you my own—let me give you my name, and leave the Countess of Castleton to await my return from Yorkshire!"

"Do you doubt me?"

"Doubt you? No! but I may be detained days and days. Rose, I come of a superstitious family; surely you know that nothing in the world is so unlucky as to put off a wedding!"

Miss Lestrangle had reasons of her own for fearing delay—reasons for wishing to be a countess as soon as might be. Their wedding was fixed for Monday, at eleven; by advancing this time two hours and a half the ceremony might take place, and the new earl proceed afterwards to his inheritance. Rosamond did not suggest this; she gave a faint hint, and Rex proposed the plan himself; then, after a little hesitation, she agreed.

"Half past eight," she said, laughing, "on a December morning—what a sight I shall look!"

"You could not look anything but beautiful! Rose, do you indeed consent?"

"But afterwards?" she suggested. "I could not come back here alone."

"I would not let you. To-morrow I will write and engage rooms at the Langham Hotel, and as soon as possible I will come from Yorkshire and rejoin my wife."

"But the clergyman, Rex. What will he say to a wedding at half past eight?"

Mr. Travers undertook to settle that; then having been forbidden to present himself at his fiancée's the next day, he took leave of her, knowing they should meet next before Heaven's altar to swear the most solemn vows man and woman can make to each other!

The matter was settled easily. A very liberal present to the clerk, a frank statement that the death of a near relation made them anxious to dispense with all festivities, and the ceremony was fixed for half past eight.

Rex had little sleep that Sunday night. He rose before it was light, and reached the church while the clerk was in the act of unfastening the massive doors. It was a very gloomy edifice; the atmosphere had a damp, musty smell, and, in spite of the fact that it was presumably warmed the day before, it was intensely cold. Rex absolutely shivered as he stood anxiously awaiting his bride.

She came alone. In most private weddings the bride and groom arrive together, or there is at least a female friend with the former. Rosamond was perfectly alone; she wore a charming toilette of ruby velvet, a small toque-like hat of the same sat lightly on her golden hair. She was more beautiful, if possible, than Rex had ever seen her.

The service began. Reginald was eager and impatient, his bride composed and quiet;

only at the clergyman's solemn charge she looked unusually grave. Perhaps she was thinking of a secret in her life, and wondering whether now, at the eleventh hour, she should change her mind about denying it.

"Too late!" she murmured to herself, "Too late!"

The service went on. Her responses were clear and audible, her voice never faltered—only when Rex took her left hand to put the ring on its third finger, he was astonished to find it deadly cold. A few more words and then the solemn injunction, "Those whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder;" five minutes more, and the husband and wife were signing their names in the register.

The Vicar watched them and wondered what romantic impulse had led to such a strange wedding. In age, looks, and breeding they seemed to him well-matched; it never once occurred to him that Lestrang was the title of a second-rate actress, and Travers the family name of the Earls of Castleton. He never once suspected Reginald's identity.

"We will breakfast at the Langham," said the Earl to his wife, "and then I must leave you. Oh, Rose, it is hard work this parting!"

"It is only for a little while."

"I wish you cared."

"I do care," she whispered. "I shall miss you terribly, Reginald, till you can come back to me."

"I shall come back as soon as possible, and then we will go abroad."

A very luxurious breakfast was served in the private sitting-room, ordered by Mrs. Travers. Reginald's feelings revolted from openly taking his uncle's titles until the old man was buried, so he had mentioned Rosamond at the hotel as Mrs. Travers.

"I must leave you."

He looked so handsome, so brave and true, that a great longing came upon her to throw herself into his arms and confess how cruelly she had deceived him; but she refrained. She only kissed his hand with pretty foreign grace.

"You do me too much honour," said Rex, gently. "Kiss my lips, Rose, not my hand."

She smiled.

"And you will come back?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"And you will write?"

"Every day. Rose, shall you think me insanely jealous if I ask you something?"

"No."

"I want you to promise me to make no fresh acquaintances until I can come back to you."

"Rex!"

"Are you angry?"

"No, but you spoke as if I made friends of anyone, and I'm sure I don't."

"Promise me, Rose!"

There was no withholding the passion of his blue eyes. The new-made Countess gave the promise demanded of her; then her husband took her in his arms and held her there until a repeated knocking at the door made him aware that his cab was waiting, and it was time to start.

He was gone.

Rosamond threw herself on the sofa, and tried to think. She was a wife; her husband was one of the wealthiest noblemen in England. The old life of toils and privations of scheming and debts was over; never more would she need to exert herself to gain her own living; never more would she be despised and slighted. Her highest ambition was satisfied, her most brilliant visions had become realities! If only—ah! that was where the shoe pinched—if only her past could be hidden in forgetfulness, if only Lord Castleton never learnt certain passages in the life of the woman he had made his wife! Alas, alas! she was young and beautiful. A good man worshipped her, all that money could procure would be hers, and yet an awful dread would haunt her. She would know no peace waking, have no repose sleeping—this constant nightmare would be her portion

night and day. No professed thief could have the fear of detection more constantly before him than the Earl's lovely wife.

It was a very long morning. Rex had left not long after nine, and the hours that followed seemed to his wife more tedious than any she had ever known. She unpacked her few possessions, changed her dress for a soft clinging cashmere; then she threw herself down on the sofa and tried to read, but it would not do. Her own life was too full of events. A tragedy was hidden too surely in her own thoughts for her to be able to fix her attention on the novelist's efforts. She flung the book away, dressed herself, and went out.

Long ago, when she had been a poverty-stricken, hardly-pressed woman, she had now and then, for a rare treat, gone to Kensington Museum; probably, for years, she had not heard of the place, but a haunting longing seemed on her this winter's afternoon to go to the spot where her rare leisure had used to be spent.

There was nothing to prevent her—nothing in the world. She took an omnibus, which set her down at the Museum door; and then she wandered up and down, barely looking at the many curiosities exhibited there, but bled in the past, haunted by the ghosts of what once had been.

She was only twenty-two! Only twenty-two—and yet there were secrets in her life women of double her age would have shuddered at the sound of; only twenty-two, and yet ambitious to her heart's core!

There were many people at the Museum that cold winter's day, and not a few of them turned to look with admiration upon the beautiful, queenly woman, who seemed to take so little interest in all around her; but Rosamond did not heed their scrutiny.

She went into the refreshment room presently, and lunched off cold chicken and champagne, thinking the while of the days when a bath bun was a luxury. Ah! why was her heart so much lighter then than now?

It was growing dark; far away in Yorkshire her husband was nearing his destination. Rosamond turned and left the Museum.

"I would if I dared!" she murmured to herself. "It is my last chance. I shall never see it again."

Perhaps she thought she might venture, for she turned away from the omnibus route, and walked down side streets and quiet by-ways until she came to a street of small six-roomed houses, got up in the villa style, and inhabited for the most part of genteel people with limited means.

Before the corner house the woman, so lately made a countess, stood and watched, with a fierce, haggard look full of pain; the blind was not lowered, the firelight flickered on the pane, and she could see the whole of the little sitting-room. She stood there as if the sight had some strange charm for her; she might have lingered longer, but she heard footsteps coming rapidly towards her. Quick as thought she drew back to where the wall of the house screened her from observation—only just in time. A tall, fine-looking man, with a happy, joyous face, had come up, and now he stood where she had so lately stood, and bent his eyes where hers had rested.

What could it mean? Why had that little, modest house such a strange attraction for these two people? Why did this man and woman come separately and gaze upon it with such eager faces?

But there was a difference in their gaze. The man's smile deepened as he stood; he evidently thought of happy things; the woman's eyes had been full of a deep despair. He dreamed of a future brighter than the past; she knew that the past joys were gone irrevocably for ever!

As he lingered the lamplighter came his round, and as the gentleman turned away, the light fell full on his face, and the lonely woman behind the wall saw and recognised him. She gave one bitter cry, unheeded in the distance. Not till he was out of sight did she

emerge from her hiding-place, and then her face was white as death!

"It is he! I should have known him anywhere! Oh! Why is fate so cruel to me?"

The Countess of Castleton hailed the first cab she saw, but when she told the man to drive her to the Langham Hotel her voice was so weak and indistinct he could hardly understand her.

She went straight to her own room and rang for the chambermaid.

"Why, ma'am!" exclaimed the girl, in real concern, "you do look ill! Your face is as white and scared as if you had seen a ghost."

Poor erring Rosamond might have answered truthfully that she had seen a ghost—the ghost of her own youthful days. She only said slowly,—

"I think I have taken a chill."

"Very likely, ma'am; it's a bitter night. Would you like the doctor sent for?"

"Yes," said Lady Castleton, promptly.

The doctor came—a quiet, grave man, who seemed surprised at the youth and loneliness of his patient.

"My husband has gone to Yorkshire," she said, gently. "I am reluctant to recall him unnecessarily."

Dr. Grant looked at her anxiously.

"You have had a terrible shock," he said, plainly; "if it is repeated I will not answer for the consequences. Your heart is not sound, madam, and you must endeavour to avoid excitement."

She thanked him with that sweet smile which made so many men her captives.

"There is no occasion to alarm my husband, is there?"

The doctor thought what a devoted wife he was.

"You can do more for yourself than he can; there is nothing in the world the matter with you; you need no drugs or tonics; you may live to be a hundred if you will only keep quiet and avoid excitement."

"And if not?"

He looked surprised.

"Surely you will be reasonable and take heed to your own safety?"

She smiled into his face.

"Doctor, there are some things beyond human control. Suppose—remember, I only say suppose—my lot is such that I cannot, I may not, obey your orders, what then?"

The doctor looked at her with unfeigned pity.

"Heaven help you then, my poor lady, for I cannot."

CHAPTER VI.

I SUPPOSE few epochs in life can be more pleasurable than that when a man goes to take possession of an entailed estate known to be unencumbered, and which comes to him through the death of no one to whom he is warmly attached.

In this case there is no anxious waiting for the will to be read—no hopes and fears. Everything is certain; the estate and revenues must be the property of the heir, even if he were a villain, and the most bitter enemy of his predecessor.

Was it to be wondered at that, as the train bore Rex Travers swiftly through the fair northern counties, he rejoiced in the splendid fortunes which awaited him? Fifty thousand pounds a year, an estate considered the loveliest in Yorkshire, a town house, and jewels fit for a duchess! That programme he had mapped out for the early part of his married life. Those foreign wanderings had sounded pleasant enough, but they were not to compare to the lot that now awaited him.

Rosamond had said she did not love the country, but, of course, she would love Castleton. Who could help it? He should see his beautiful wife the most admired woman in the county. Together they would revive the Castle's old renown for hospitality; together they would—

Here Reginald's bright dreams were brought to a sudden stop. A stranger, who sat opposite him, a quiet business sort of man, asked him suddenly if he was going to Castleton. Doubtless he had read the name on the portmanteau over his head.

"Yes."

"Dreadful thing about the Earl!"

"Perhaps you can enlighten me? I have heard no particulars. The butler telegraphed to me the bare fact of his death."

"He was killed in a railway accident. Death must have been instantaneous."

"I thought he never left home?"

"He had not left it for fifteen years. I feel a strange remorse when I think of his death, for it was I who persuaded him to go to London."

"You knew him then?"

"I knew him well some years ago. I went to Castleton the week before last on business, and persuaded your uncle to return with me to London. Lord Castleton. When I heard of his death it gave me a dreadful shock."

"I see you know me."

"It is not difficult to recognize you from your likeness to your uncle."

"I can remember very little about him—poor old man! I dare say he was tired enough of his life."

"I should not like to say. Of course, his end was terribly sudden. I hope for your sake he has made a will."

"It will matter little," said Rex, with a careless smile. "When a man succeeds in fifty thousand a year he can afford not to be anxious for more!"

Mr. Ashwin looked very serious.

"Is it possible," he asked, "you have not heard of the Earl's discovery?"

"No discovery can affect my position," returned Rex, stiffly. "My father was a year younger than the Earl, and I am his only son."

"Ah!"

"You must have taken up some extraordinary delusion if you fancy any art of your late friends could cut me out of Castleton; had he hated me I must still have been his heir. As a matter of fact, though, he has been very generous to me, and allowed me a comfortable yearly income."

Mr. Ashwin relapsed into silence. After all, he had heard no mention of Lady Gerda since the accident; it might be she had died with her father, and this handsome, stately kinsman might thus really be master of her inheritance.

"You are going to Castleton, I suppose?" said Rex, after a long pause, and with no great show of cordiality.

"I hope to follow your uncle to the grave; but I am not going now to Castleton. I have business here," as the train stopped at the station where the accident had taken place.

"We shall meet again, I trust," said Rex more amiably. "My uncle's friends must not be strangers to my house."

Mr. Ashwin bowed. A moment later and he was with the station-master, talking about the accident.

"A young lady?" said that official. "Sure enough, sir, I remember, a slight, delicate creature; she seemed to have no friends, and no one made any inquiries about her, so we sent her to the hospital."

Mr. Ashwin's blood boiled. The heiress of the Castle—mistress of countless thousands—and they had sent her to the hospital, because, forsooth, they feared to lose the miserable trifle the care of her might cost them!

He hired a chaise and drove off to the hospital.

The matron, a pleasant-faced woman of fifty, received him into her own parlour, when she heard the patient he had come to see.

"Indeed, we have been very troubled about her," she said, simply. "Her clothes were only marked 'Gerda,' and we could find out nothing of her history."

"Is she unconscious?"

"Delirious."

Mr. Ashwin grew grave.

"I had hoped to see her. It is of the utmost importance—but I would not do so at any danger to herself."

The doctor was called to the consultation.

"It is the strangest case I ever saw," he said, cordially. "The girl has no injuries to account for her state of mind—indeed, she is perfectly rational on all points except her own identity. She actually declares, poor creature, she is Lord Castleton's daughter, and cried herself nearly ill when she heard he was dead."

Mr. Ashwin smiled; he handed his card to the doctor.

"This will assure you I am a respectable person. Lawyers are not supposed to be romantic, therefore I trust you will credit my statement. This poor girl is the late Earl of Castleton's daughter—the Lady Gerda Travers, and the heiress of her father's estates!"

The matron threw up her hands, the doctor gasped.

"But Lord Castleton had been a widower for thirty years and more; this girl can't be twenty!"

"She is eighteen. Her mother, Lord Castleton's second wife, died a few days ago. There had been a terrible mistake which parted the countess and her husband for years, but he was at her deathbed, and received his daughter from her hands. He was bringing the poor child here to install her mistress of his home, when the terrible calamity occurred which made her doubly an orphan!"

Doctor and matron listened with amazement; the little lonely creature for whom no refuge had offered but the hospital—who had been there two whole days and nights without anyone troubling to inquire for her—to think of her as an Earl's daughter seemed incredible.

"You would like to see her?"

"I wish it very much," returned Thomas Ashwin, gravely, "but not if it will be any injury to herself."

They had carried Gerda into the fever ward, and she was its only occupant. Mr. Ashwin, therefore, would be as much alone with her as though she had been in her own little parlour at the lodgings she had so long called home.

Man of business though he was, a mist seemed to rise before his eyes as he caught sight of the fair, young creature who was mistress of countless thousands.

Gerda had been dozing lightly. She woke suddenly, and uttered a cry of delight as she recognised Mr. Ashwin.

"You will tell them," she murmured, "you will assure them, I am no deceiver—that my story is true, and I am Gerda Travers."

"I have told them already." Then, as the matron came in, he turned to her rather pointedly. "Do you think there would be any danger in removing the Lady Gerda to her own home?"

The matron was all smiles and affability.

"You'd be best here, my lady," she said respectfully. "You've had a woeful shock, and a night's journey this biting frost won't improve you; better far stay with us until the morning."

Thomas Ashwin felt that it was best. He took a warm farewell of his patron's daughter and went on to Castleton, where he himself meant to pass the night.

Thanks to the hunting character of the neighbourhood, there was more accommodation than he had dared to hope for; the "Travers Arms," a neat clean hostelry, had good cheer for man and beast.

A strange misgiving had seized Mr. Ashwin, since his interview with the new Lord Castleton, that there might be some delay in proving Gerda's rights, and that till they were proved there would be no place for her at the Castle.

So, anxious in all things to befriend the lonely orphan, early the next morning he summoned the landlady to a consultation.

Mrs. Brown declared she would be proud to receive a young lady; her best rooms should be got ready, and everything the "Travers Arms" could provide should be at the service of Mr. Ashwin's friend. Would the young lady stay in Yorkshire long?

Mr. Ashwin could give her no idea. It might be a day, it might be a month. He was willing to pay handsomely if care and quiet could be secured for his young friend who had been in the railway accident of Saturday, and much shaken and frightened by the shock. Having given this information he hired the best carriage the inn could produce, and drove off to the hospital.

Gerda was ready for him. Dressed in the elegant mourning she had donned only so recently for her mother, her sweet face saddened by her double grief, there was an inexpressible charm about her. She might lack the brilliant beauty of Rosamond LeStrange, but, like her own sweet mother, she had a wonderful attractiveness, an indescribable fascination about her, which made those who once looked at her turn again and again to judge for themselves of the loveliness of her limpid eyes.

"Are we going home?" asked Gerda, as they drove rapidly along.

"Not yet. I will take you to the Castle in the afternoon."

"Why not now?"

"The Earl is engaged with people on business. I particularly wish him to be at liberty when I take you to the Castle."

"Papa spoke so kindly of him. I think papa loved him. Will he be like a brother to me, Mr. Ashwin?"

The man of the world sighed. If Lord Castleton resented his own loss of fortune on this innocent girl he would have scant pity for him; and yet Mr. Ashwin confessed it was hard to lose an ancestral mansion and fifty thousand pounds a year at one stroke.

The two lunched together at the "Travers Arms," and about three o'clock Mr. Ashwin requested Gerda to get ready to accompany him to the Castle. Her feet trembled so she wondered how she could possibly walk even the few yards which separated the village inn from the Castle; but Mr. Ashwin had no intention of her walking. The hired carriage was in waiting, and in it they drove almost in perfect silence to the Castle.

"My dear," said Mr. Ashwin, as the carriage stopped, "be brave. Remember it is only a question of time. Nothing in the world that your cousin can do or say can alter facts. You are the Lady Gerda Travers, and your father's heiress."

"Do you mean my cousin will doubt my identity?" she asked timidly.

"I fear so."

"But—"

He stopped her.

"But you have promised to be brave and trust to me. Now," as he heard advancing footsteps, "leave the matter in my hands."

Giles stared at the apparition. He really began to think there was something uncanny about Mr. Ashwin. That gentleman had such a knack of appearing before him at unlooked for times and seasons.

"Sir," he began, abruptly, "the master's gone. Surely you have heard?"

"I have," and he looked kindly on the old retainer. "I could almost wish, Giles, I had never enticed him to London, but that I know the journey brought him the truest happiness."

Giles wiped away a tear fortively. With all the Earl's peculiarities this old servant had contrived to love him warmly.

"Giles," went on Mr. Ashwin, gravely, "do you remember the morning we left here?"

"Ay, sir, the last time I ever saw my master alive. Am I like to forget it?"

"The Earl gave orders the blue rooms should be prepared for his return."

"He did, sir. He mentioned them again in a telegram he sent from London. I think his mind must have been wandering ever since. Those rooms have never been used by anyone but the Ladies Castleton or their daughters."

"Just so."

"And there is not a lady in the family, sir."



[THE EARL OF CASTLETON'S WILL.]

"Listen, Giles. When Lord Castleton left here he went to London to join his wife. It was for her those rooms were to be prepared."

"Good gracious!"

"She did not live to mourn her husband; the Earl was only in time to receive her last words. He waited until she was buried, and then he started for Castleton on Saturday."

"Ay, sir."

"But not alone; with him came his only child—she for whom the blue rooms were to be prepared, she who is beside us now, the Lady Gerda Travers."

Giles started; he gave one look at Gerda's face and fell to sobbing bitterly.

"She's the Castleton features, sir, a true Travers' face; but oh! why did she not come before? Think of all the lonely years my master had!"

"I could not come," said Gerda, simply. "I did not know. Now, Giles, will you let us see my cousin—the new Earl of Castleton?"

Giles looked all astray.

"But he's nobody, my lady, since you're here. It's you'll be our mistress—you who are the Lady of Castleton!"

"He is my cousin," said Gerda, with a simple dignity; "we two are the last of the old name, Giles, and I wish to see him."

"The Earl is in the library, my lady, but—"

"You will announce us," said her ladyship, with that nameless air of command which seemed to come to her in her need. "I will hold you blameless."

Rex was looking over his uncle's papers and searching vainly for a will when the library door was thrown open, and in his most stentorian voice Giles proclaimed,—

"The Lady Gerda Travers and Mr. Ashwin!"

The door closed, Rex rose to his feet; he saw his whilom fellow-traveller and a young lady. He never gave a grain of credence to the story; he believed it some infamous plot to extort money.

"There is some mistake," he said, coldly, "there is no lady with a right to bear our name."

"Your pardon, my lord," said Mr. Ashwin, gravely, "this lady is your late uncle's only child. She was on her way to Castleton with her father when this terrible accident made her an orphan. I have been in the late Earl's confidence for years. I can produce ample proof of his daughter's birth and parentage."

"It is a string of lies!"

The elder man drew himself up stiffly.

"It is the first time my word was ever doubted, Lord Castleton! This is a bitter disappointment to you, and I can make allowances for your natural annoyance; but the fact remains. Lady Gerda Travers is before you, she has come to claim her inheritance!"

"She had better prove first that it is hers!"

Gerda rose to her feet. She looked at him with her beautiful eyes, and Rex felt somehow that she read him through and through.

"Take it all!" she cried, impulsively.

"What do I want with riches when I stand alone in the world? Would money bring my father back to me, or restore my angel mother? Keep the estates of the Castletons, my lord! I am not afraid to work for daily bread!"

"Nonsense!" said Reginald, curtly. "If you are what you claim to be all is yours; but I warn you, I will contest your claim to the bitter end! I will accept no compromise! I will have all or nothing!"

"My father called you generous," said Gerda, with a kind of dumb reproach in her eyes. "He said you would give me a brother's care and counsel; I find he was mistaken."

"I hate concealments!"

"So do I," wearily. "Mr. Ashwin, I am very tired. I cannot stay here when my own kinsman doubts my word. Take me away."

She leant upon his arm, and he led her from the room.

Reginald, standing there, watched them go, and felt dimly that he was in the wrong, that

he had cruelly insulted an orphan girl. But he would not, dared not, think of his own position if her claim were true. Unless Lord Castleton had provided for him handsomely by will he would be cast penniless on the world—if the late visitor were indeed his cousin!

Penniless on the world and encumbered with a beautiful wife, who had never hidden from him that she had been won, not by his love and tenderness, not by his handsome face and courtly manners, but simply and solely by his prospective title and riches.

Left alone, Rex wrote off, post haste, to the family lawyer a full account of his late callers.

"If it is true," he added, "I am undone, unless, indeed, the Earl bequeathed to me his funded property, which was considerable. I have searched everywhere for a will. I must search again with renewed zeal."

His letter gone, he bethought himself Lord Castleton might have made a will in London, and brought it home with him on that fatal journey.

The thought of opening the dead man's portmanteau was odious to him, but in Rosamond's interests what would he not have endured?

With Giles in attendance he went upstairs and saw the old-fashioned leather portmanteau emptied of its contents.

He sat down on a chair the better to examine the articles handed for his inspection.

If Gerda's claim were true—and in his heart of hearts he feared it was true—ruin stared him in the face; unless Lord Castleton had thought of his disappointment, and provided for him by will.

It came at last, when Rex had well-nigh given up hope; an official-looking envelope tied with red tape, and sealed. The young nobleman opened it with beating heart. It contained a single sheet of writing-paper endorsed,—

"The last will and testament of Guy Travers, fourteenth Earl of Castleton."

(To be continued.)



[A HAND HEAVIER THAN A WOMAN'S FELL THE VILLAIN TO THE EARTH AT BLANCHE'S FEET !]

NOVELETTE—continued.]

QUEENIE'S COMPANION.

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CHAPTER V.

ONLY A FADED PHOTO.

QUEENIE was delighted at the arrangement her guardian and Madame Beauvais had arrived at, and no one was more interested in the preparations being made for the approach-wedding than she was.

"It will be just as if I had come back to my own parents," she was saying, as her eyes in youthful delight were feasting themselves on the bridal dress which had that day been sent from Paris. "How lovely you are, dear!" she continued, touching with dainty fingers the rich white texture she was so admiring.

But Madame was paying but little attention to the girlish chatter, her eyes, with a far-away look in their blue depths, gazing out on the landscape before her, the green corn, on which she and Queenie had looked but three short months since, now like a wave of gold, rising and falling in the distance.

Guy had left Fernside for a time, not to return until he came to claim his bride, when, at the express wish of its mistress, they should live there as though it was their own.

"I should be so miserable here without you both," she said, in favour of her argument that it would not be home without them.

"But you will marry one day," Guy had told her.

"And even if I do, Gardy," she replied, with a pretty pout, "I suppose I shan't marry a man who can't give me a home."

So in the end it was agreed that the newly-wedded pair should become her tenants, and she to remain with them until that probable event at which her guardian had hinted should occur.

"May I arrange your jewel-case now?" she

said, leaving the dress, which failed to give her further delight, and advancing to where her friend still looked out on the deep green of trees already tinted with autumn red.

Madame turned then, but the face which looked into hers was so drawn with pain that Queenie gave a start.

"What is the matter, dear?" she asked.

"Is it so very dreadful to get married that it makes you look so miserable? I should be so glad, I know I should, if I were to be the bride, and live all my life with anyone I loved, as you do, Gardy, for you do love him, do you not?"

"Dearly, my child, dearly!" Madame replied, with a dry sob she could not control.

She had turned to where the girl stood by her side in all her fresh young beauty, which seemed to awaken a memory in her heart, wrought with a long-buried grief; for, drawing the youthful face close to her own, she impressed kiss after kiss on her ruby lips.

"I am a little worried, Queenie, that is all," she explained; "someone in Paris whom I know is in great straits, and has written to me for assistance which I am unable to give."

"Oh, dear; are they very badly off, and have you known them long?" the girl asked.

"A long, long time," Madame answered, with a weary sigh.

Queenie said no more. She was wondering in her mind who it was who could have any claim on Blanche, for she thought she had no friends; and then, saying she would be back in a moment, she left the room.

On her return Madame was seated at the table, turning over the contents of a writing-desk before her, and some letters she was looking at were hastily replaced when Queenie entered.

"You have not been long, dear!" she said.

"No; I told you I should not," she answered, gaily advancing to where the other still sat, when, throwing herself on her knees by her side,—

"How much money would do for your friend?" she asked.

"More than I can spare, child," was the reply, "so I will send nothing."

"But you would like to, would you not?" Queenie asked.

The tears started to Madame's eyes, and she turned her head aside that the girl at her feet might not see the great pain, which was making her face to look like that of an old woman.

"Look here," Queenie went on, "don't be unhappy. See, I have brought you some notes. Gardy left them for me before he went away," and she counted out a hundred pounds, which she pressed into the hands of Blanche.

"I cannot, I cannot, my darling, rob my own—rob you! Indeed, indeed, I cannot!" she exclaimed, whilst the tears she could no longer control rushed from her eyes.

But Queenie's arms were around her neck—Queenie's gentle voice was sounding in her ears.

"Don't cry, dear," she was saying. "Take them!" pushing the notes towards her; "you can pay me back when you are able, if you will; but I don't want them—indeed I don't!"

But Madame let them remain where she had placed them, the while she was looking into the sweet face before her.

She pushed back the tiny curls which nestled so thickly on the pure white forehead.

"My darling! my darling! that it should come to this!" she murmured; and then she lifted her from her lowly position.

"You must not kneel to me, Queenie," she said.

And as she arose she turned the key of her desk, in which she had placed the bank-notes.

That night Fernside was broken into, the thief or thieves carrying off such property as they could lay their hands on.

Old Scott had heard the hall door close

between twelve and one; but what could he have done—poor old man!—by himself? and the other servants, when aroused, could see no one, although after searching the house they made a survey of the grounds.

Madame's jewel case had been broken open, and the splendid diamond ornaments, of which Guy had made her a present but a week back, gone. Also the hundred pounds which Queenie had but that day seen deposited in her desk were also taken.

The servants were all questioned, but had not heard a sound, with the exception of one of the housemaids, who was awakened by the barking of one of the dogs. She got up to look out of the window, when she declared she saw a woman all in white come from the plantation, and she was so frightened she could not stir afterwards.

"The ghost again!" Madame laughed. "But ghosts don't usually rob houses!"

"No, not if they didn't 'flesh an' blood!" Scott said, looking straight at Madame, whom he told the other servants he never could abide!

"If it had been my own money," Blanche said, "I would not have minded, but now I am ashamed of myself for assisting my poor friends. Besides, the jewels—dear Guy's—rather anything than that!"

But the thief, whoever he was, had, it appeared, alone favoured Madame with his attentions, and not ransacked the whole house, as everyone at first thought and Scott insisted on informing the neighbours was the case, her desk and her jewels being carried off, and the plate remaining untouched.

Queenie insisted on telegraphing to her guardian, notwithstanding that Blanche endeavoured to dissuade her from so doing, and Guy wired back that he would send a detective from Scotland Yard if they wished it; but Madame so expressed her horror of anything to do with the police that she wrote him she thought it useless to take any steps in the matter, further than to give information of the robbery and a description of the property stolen.

She did not tell him the notes taken were those he had given to Queenie, or doubtless he would have known the numbers and stopped them, whilst Queenie herself did not like to mention such was the case, looking upon the matter as a secret of great importance between her and Blanche.

Madame Neville had, on hearing from her brother of his engagement, written him at once.

"I hope, dear Guy, you are perfectly satisfied, and will be happy in your choice; but I must tell you I know nothing further of Madame Beauvais's antecedents than that I happened to meet her at a reunion given by the Countess de Boileau, and I thought her a most charming young widow. The Countess was an old lady apparently devotedly attached to her, and when I mentioned my inability to go to England with Queenie she proposed that she should undertake the duty for me. I thought it so kind, for, being unaware that the child was an heiress, or even where she was going to, she could have had no motive in accompanying her beyond an act of friendship on her part."

And Guy was satisfied, asking no more, only looking forward to the day when he should call Blanche wife as the happiest of his life.

He had never asked her of her former married life, and she told him nothing beyond that she was wedded but three years, when she was left a widow; the remembrance of the past apparently causing her such pain that he never referred to it after.

The day fixed for the wedding was fast approaching, Queenie displaying far more excitement at the prospect of the coming event than the bride-elect, who only evinced a restlessness and anxiety which seemed uncalled for.

Her face had become terribly pale, with a deep purple rim around the eyes, like one who

had passed night after night of unrest; and at times Queenie would discover her in tears, which she would hastily brush aside at her approach.

Nothing farther respecting the robbery had been heard of, and she had told her youthful companion it was of no use to worry further about it, for she had from the first given the things up as lost.

Guy arrived the next day, Tuesday. The wedding being arranged to be solemnized on the following Saturday he had only paid a flying visit, he told them, as in the morning he should go back to town, and see Fernside no more until he met his bride at the little church where they had agreed to be married quietly—Queenie as bridemaid, and a friend of Guy's as best man.

"I could not stay away altogether," he told Blanche, who had put a heavy wrap over her shoulders the while she strolled with him that evening on the soft smooth grass beneath the trees, all still now, as the silent stars came out one by one in the deep blue sky.

And scarce less silent than they, Madame came along to her lover's arm, her fair, pale face uplifted to his, with a fear she could not hide displaying itself in her anxious eyes.

"Are you not well, dearest?" he asked, his big heart asking the while he saw how thin and pale she had become. "You are not frightened now, darling?" he continued, ascribing his earlier looks to the robbery at Fernside. "Only a few more days, and I shall always be with you to protect you while life lasts!"

"It is not that, Guy," she answered. "I have overcome any fear I may have had on that point; but a fear I cannot describe—an untold dread cannot explain—at times comes over me; a presentiment that at the last we should be parted. Oh! my love, my love! tell me that whatever may come between us, you will never forsake me—you will love me to the end!"

She had spoken so rapidly, so excitedly, that at first Guy could not take in the purport of her words; and then a terrible suspicion took possession of his brain. Could there be a secret in this woman's life which would bring dishonour on the name he so proudly bore? And as these thoughts chased each other through his mind he reeled like a drunken man, whilst a cold sweat stood in large beads on his forehead.

"What can come between us, Blanche," he said, "if you are true, as I believe you are?"

"I am true in my love for you, Guy—true as the stars above us!" she answered.

All traces of tears had left her face then, but she started from his side, almost a scream upon her lips, as the sky, suddenly becoming overcast, the rain descended in heavy drops between them where they stood.

"A bad omen! a bad omen!" she gasped; but Guy took no heed further than to link her arm within his, and lead her gently within.

"You will be wet through, darling!" he said, while he urged her to quicken her steps.

Queenie was seated in the drawing-room, unconscious of the rain without, and not, until her guardian with Madame entered, being aware of the fact.

"You will have to get Mrs. Scott to make me up a bed here to-night, Queenie," he said, "for it is too wet to seek one in that wretched little inn!"

"Certainly, Gardy!" the girl answered, at the same time rising to ring the bell.

"You have dropped something," Guy said, stooping the while to recover a photograph which had fallen from her dress as she arose.

It was the portrait of a young man, evidently taken some years since, for it was faded, notwithstanding the care which had been taken to preserve it, and he was about to lay it unnoticed on the table when something in the features attracted his attention.

Madame had left the room to change her wet dress, and Guy looked long and earnestly at the old photo before making any remark

on it; but as Queenie advanced to look over his shoulder he asked,—

"Where did you get this from, Queenie?"

"It does not belong to me, Gardy," she answered. "I found it on the floor of Madame's room, after the night her desk was broken open and the contents stolen, and I have intended ever since to give it her, but forgot to do so until now—but here she is!" she exclaimed, as Blanche entered the room.

"Is this your property, Blanche?" Guy asked, but Madame merely gave a cursory glance at the carte held towards her.

"It does not belong to me," she replied. "But why do you ask?"

"Because Queenie found it in your room," she said, no more, only that from its age she should think it had been laying there some time, and then she repaired to the piano, sorting the songs Guy loved best.

But he was still looking at the photo—a strange revelation of emotions stirring within him, and then he gave it back to Queenie.

"Take care of it, child," he said. "The picture is an old one, but the features are still discernible; they are those of my poor friend, Jack Mainwaring—your father!"

CHAPTER VI.

AN ASSIGNATION.

It was a long time that Queenie remained looking fixedly at the old faded photo, poring over the features of the father she had lost when too young to remember him; and although she would fain have attracted Madame's attention, it was without effect, for Blanche played air after air, seemingly so wrapt up in her music that she was deaf to aught else.

"And did you never know mamma, Gardy?" she asked, "I should so like to meet with someone who could tell me something about her, but no one seems to know; even Mrs. Scott, when I have asked her, saying, 'I know nothing about your ma, Miss Queenie, and I'm sure it is better you don't neither;' and then she'd hurry off, on a pretence she was wanted by one of the servants."

"Not very satisfactory, certainly, Queenie," Guy laughed; "but never having seen your father's wife—as it was after her death that I came to Fernside—I am afraid I can enlighten you no further than Mrs. Scott, and she appears to tell you nothing."

"No," the girl answered, ruefully; "only one day she said, 'Madame Beauvais was the very image of her,' and then she was called away again, as usual."

Blanche had arisen from the instrument then; she was very tired, she said, and would be glad to go to bed.

Guy looked up; she seemed indeed, weary, and saying he had no idea of the lateness of the hour immediately rang for lights, telling his young ward she would lose her roses too if they kept such late hours.

"Good-night, my child!" he said, kissing her, and then he waited for a moment until Queenie had led the way, and Blanche lingered behind to be the last whose kiss should rest on his lips, when he should ascend to his own repose.

"Your room is all ready, Gardy, and no fear of damp sheets!" Queenie laughingly turned round to say, and then they parted for the night.

But it was some time before Guy could make up his mind to retire. The rain had ceased, and as he sat by the open window (for it had turned out a lovely night) smoking his cigar, a thousand thoughts crowded through his brain.

"Was he right," he asked himself again and again, "to allow his affections to master his wisdom. Blanche, whom he loved with all the strength of his strong nature, what did he know of her? An acquaintance of but a few weeks," and then he found himself so deeply enamoured of her that he was blind to

all reason—to everything but her beauty, her powers of fascination—until, in fact, with his own hands he might be fastening a millstone around his own neck.

Would it not have been wiser to have asked her of her past, to have questioned her more closely respecting her family, and why, as she had told him, she was alone in the world?

But Guy was not wise. He was too much in love to be sensible; and so he pook, pooked each resolution he was about to form, and even at the last grew so angry with himself that for one moment he should harbour a suspicion with regard to his *fiancée* that he threw away the cigar he had been smoking, and was about to close the window, when his eyes became suddenly riveted on some object in the distance.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "after all, is there really some truth in Fernside being haunted?"

It was just then that the clock in Lord Nevare's stables struck twelve, and fearless as Guy was, something like a cold shiver passed through his frame as he saw disappear in the gloom of the plantation a figure in white, such as had been spoken of in the servants' hall.

For some seconds he sat as though riveted to the spot—a power he could not withstand chaining him there, where he expected each moment to see the object of his curiosity reappear; but his eyes alone rested on the soft still scene, each object clear as day beneath the bright moonbeams. Not a sound was to be heard; even the whispering rustling leaves were hushed in the quiet calm.

For one moment Guy thought to give it no further heed, and then an uncontrollable desire to fathom the mystery took possession of him; when hastily donning the garments he had so recently divested himself of, he prepared to seek the solution of that which appeared so strange.

Warm as the night was, a chill passed through his frame when, descending the broad staircase, he approached the entrance hall.

Nero, Queenie's favourite dog, was asleep on the mat; but he merely looked up, wagged his tail, and questioned his movements no further, until Guy opened the door, when he showed an inclination to follow.

"No, Nero! down, down;" and evidently curious, although obedient, he resumed his recumbent position on the mat, as the door was gently closed upon him.

The springy turf hiding every sound, it was with a noiseless tread that Guy continued his way to where he had seen the figure disappear in the plantation at the back of the house; his bedroom having been so situate as to overlook the same.

Nothing was visible; and Guy began to think what he had seen must have been but the illusion of his brain; and he was about to retrace his steps, when through a break in the shrubbery he could discern the glimmer of a white dress; and the moon then emerging from a cloud, in full radiance, clear as day, he saw before him the figure which had attracted his attention but a short time since.

Beside it was the form of a man, whose features and bearing had something familiar in them; even in that uncertain light; and, acting on the impulse of the moment, Guy was about to rush forward, when a wise course presented itself to him; and with a strong effort controlling his impetuosity he drew back within the shadow of a large tree, where, unobserved himself, he could be a witness of all that took place.

He could feel his heart beating in tumultuous throbs against his breast, and he even thought at times his hard breathing must be audible to those two. But they were too much absorbed in their own conversation to fear or think of an interruption which they considered impossible.

It was the man who spoke first. "I will come this day week then," he said, "and mind, no false play, or you will live to repent it."

His companion was crying bitterly, and

Guy could hear her sobs, as they resounded so plainly in the still night air, but when she spoke he felt the blood surge to his temples, and then flow back, leaving him like one frozen beneath the summer sky.

"I cannot, Manvers! indeed I cannot. I have brought all I can to you," the woman said.

"A paltry hundred," the other replied, "of which not a pound is left. No, no, my lady! I must have another four at least, or—you know the consequences;" and coolly taking a cigar from his pocket he proceeded to light it.

"But my diamonds, they will realize double the amount!" she answered.

"Yes, yes! I know, my dear! Very likely; but I am not the lad to run into the trap with my eyes wide open," he replied, with a nonchalant air. "They will come in useful at a future date. Hard cash is what I require now, and hard cash is what I must have!"

"And how am I to get it?" she asked.

"For Heaven's sake, have mercy!" she had lifted her hands to him then, with a supplicating gesture, while the tears streamed down her face so white, on which the moonbeams rested.

But her agony, her appeal to his generosity, was thrown away on the villain who confronted her.

"You are a beautiful woman, Blanche!" he said; "but heroines, my dear, are thrown away upon me! I have outlived them, you see; besides, I don't consider the rôle suits you."

But she paid no heed to the implied insult. "You never loved me, Manvers," she said, bitterly.

"A mistake we both made, I presume," he returned. "And when a man did, you know, you only deceived him for his pains; so perhaps it was better for myself that my feeling for you never exceeded admiration."

She made no reply, only burying her face in her hands, and Guy could see how her figure shook with emotion.

Even the man by her side at the moment appeared to feel pity for her in her great sorrow, but after awhile he began to grow impatient.

"I can't stop here all night, Blanche," he said. "It is getting quite cold. Don't be a fool; I won't trouble you again until you are Mrs. Silverton"—and he laughed a brutish laugh,—and then you must wheedle your beloved out of the trifle required by your humble servant, or you know the result. Dear Guy will know in full the antecedents of his charming wife!"

The sneering tone, the brutal threat, seemed to arouse the dormant spirit in her breast. She was no longer the suppliant for his mercy, but rising defiant before him, she roused herself to a last effort.

"Never, Manvers Bisgarde!" she said, the while a sudden inspiration appeared to endow her with an unnatural strength. "What I have given you, or rather what you have drawn from me, by means worse than the instruments of torture, has been my own to give, but never for the sake of a villain will I stoop to rob an honourable and good man. Guy Silverton," she continued, holding up her hand to command his silence, "shall never take me to wife until he knows all. Far rather would I go to my grave than that he should lead me to the altar a deceived man."

The change in her manner for the moment paralysed her hearer; but when she ceased, overpowered by her emotion, he speedily recovered himself.

"Just as I expected, Blanche," he sneered. "You have feathered your own nest whilst I may go to the wall. Even in the event of this good man forsaking you, you rely upon filial affection to obtain for you a shelter at Fernside."

"It is useless to recriminate," she replied more calmly, "but doubtless your memory will not fail to remind you of the time when, grown weary of the toy you had stolen from

your friend, you threw it on one side, caring not what became of it in the future."

"It was your own fault," he said, sullenly, "your temper was unbearable. Your constant upbraids maddening."

"Then why did you follow me here," she asked. "Could you not allow me to remain in the peace I had found at last?"

"I wanted to know where you were, for after we parted I missed you so much, Blanche! I felt I could not rest until I had seen you again," he whined.

He made a step towards her then, as though he would place his arm around her, but she shrank from him as from the sting of a serpent.

"Don't touch me," she cried, as she sprang on one side.

It was then that his pent-up fury gave vent, and the penitent mood he had assumed changed to one of baffled rage, and raising his hand he would have dealt her a murderous blow had not a hand heavier than hers felled him to the earth at her feet.

It was but the work of a second, and when Blanche turned to whence her deliverer came, there, but a few paces distant, in the still pale light, his features drawn and pinched with mental agony, stood Guy Silverton.

CHAPTER VII.

AT DEATH'S DOOR.

STUNNED for the moment, Manvers Bisgarde lay white and still on the damp grass, and not until a slight groan escaped his lips did either make a movement towards him.

Like one paralysed Blanche still remained by the side of the prostrate man, neither by sign or movement giving any heed, the while Guy held out his hand to assist him to rise.

"Get up," he said, "and never again, I warn you, let your vile presence throw its shadow over the grounds of Fernside. I know you, Captain Bisgarde, the once bosom friend of the best man who ever trod God's earth. Until now I never knew of the villainy which, through you, brought him to an early grave, but may Heaven forgive you as he did at the last. It is that alone which now induces me to be lenient with you, because, like him, I would not her name was dragged in the dust."

For one moment his eyes were turned in pity to where Blanche stood like as to stone, and then he again addressed the other.

"Give me your word never to pass through yonder gate again, and I will let you go a free man? But the first time you attempt to play me false you will sleep within the walls of the county gaol."

"I submit," was all the other vouchsafed, the while he bowed low before his antagonist; then, as he turned to leave, for a second he stood to gaze with a fiendish delight on the dumb agony of the woman he had ruined, when, hurling an opprobrious epithet at her, he disappeared amid the shrubs which led to the entrance.

And Guy still remained where he had left him, never moving until he could see his figure pass through the gate in the distance, and then he advanced to Blanche.

But she made no sign, allowing him to wrap closer round her the white fleecy robe in which she was dressed, her lips apparently sealed the while her eyes alone, like those of a dumb animal, were raised to his in mortal agony.

Silently he led her over the dewy grass, the pale stars looking down in pity on her, and in that moment Guy forgot his wrongs, her crime, all but the intense love which in this, her hour of sorrow, went out to her in all its strength.

Even Nero looked up pityingly, as gently he led her within, closing the door noiselessly after, and he lifted his shaggy head, and would feign have licked her hand; but she took no heed, only following like one in a trance to wherever Guy went. And so he took

her into the pretty drawing-room, laying her unresistingly on the blue satin of the couch where she had so often sat in her joyous beauty, and then he watched—watched by her side, the cold of early dawn cramping his limbs the while, and she looking out around, with that dull, cold stare in her lovely eyes.

The tears he could ill restrain would fall in great big splashes on the white hand he held in his; but she was dumb to all, all but the great sorrow which had taken the light from her life and the joy from his.

But as the grey streaks of morning broke in the eastern sky the weary lids closed, as though nature could no longer withstand the strain; and then, like an infant, he lifted her in his strong arms, carrying her to the room he knew was hers, and there he left her, covering her with such as he could find to keep her warm, for it had become so chilly on the dawn of another day—left her, with the impress of his lips on her cold, pale face.

The next morning they found her, still calm and silent, and Guy was aware all Fernside knew how ill she was, the while with him alone did the secret remain. Not even to Queenie could he bring himself to divulge what, in that dreadful night, he had learnt; and so Blanche, who spoke wildly in the days that followed, had no one around her who could associate her fancies with the sad truth.

"I think Madame must have had a daughter like me, Guardy," Queenie said, on returning from the sick room, "for she is always calling me her little girl, and saying she has come back to me."

"Very likely," Guy answered; "but people are not accountable for what they say in delirium, my child." So she made no further remark on the sick woman's ravings.

Madame Nevelle had been summoned from Paris, where she was living then; for, notwithstanding that a hired nurse had been installed in the sick room by the doctor who had been called in, Guy, much to Mrs. Scott's annoyance, thought there was not sufficient attention paid to the invalid.

"Well, I never!" she confided to her husband. "If it had been Queenie herself there could not have been more fuss made," and numerous were the remarks passed and suggestions started respecting the sick woman.

But Matilda or Queenie were ever one of them within the sick room, so that whatever ill-natured comments were raised they never reached the ears of Blanche, who, now that the danger was past, began day by day to gain strength, and even a faint tint of the rose colour, which had for so long been a stranger to her cheeks.

It was now six weeks since that night on which Guy Silverton had led her from the plantation in the pale moonlight.

Madame Nevelle was seated by her side, as she lay on the couch which was drawn up to the fire, for it was growing cold and chill in those days of the late autumn.

She was not allowed to talk much, for it was but a week that she had been permitted to leave her bed.

She had thought much of Guy, but with those thoughts had come the memory of that dreadful night, which had ever haunted her throughout her illness, like the phantasy of some horrible dream, until she had feared to let his name pass her lips.

"Guy—Mr. Silverton," she said, looking up into the elder lady's face, "I should so like to see him. Has he gone?" and then she twitched nervously at the embroidery of the robe she was wearing.

"No, dear," Madame Nevelle said, "he was here but a short time since to hear how you are."

"Then he has not forgotten me?" she added, with a glad light in her eyes, looking so large in the thin, white face. "We were to have been married, you know, and then something terrible came between us!" and she hid her face as though even then to shut it from her sight.

"Hush, hush! You have been over-exciting

yourself," Madame replied, when the door opened gently, and Queenie's bright young face peeped in.

"Oh! you are awake! I am so glad! See what I have brought you!" she said, "and I am going to see you eat just two or three great big ones, and then someone else—dear old Guardy, you know—wants to be sure that he may come. He is just like a great baby, almost crying because I would not let him bring you these!" and Queenie held up a cluster of hothouse grapes, purple and juicy, from which she singled the best to tempt the invalid.

But Madame Beauvais thought less of the fruit—notwithstanding the darling fingers which nipped them so deftly for her from their stalk—the while a gleam of pleasure caused the blood to rise to her temples, and leave a crimson hue beneath the transparent skin, when, according to her promise, as a reward for eating the grapes, the girl rose to seek Guy.

"We will leave you for a time," his sister said, leading Queenie from the room; "but mind, not too much talking, sir, or I shall usurp my authority and put an end to your *little & little*!"

Guy smiled in response, the while he was trembling like a girl, as he advanced to where Blanche lay so waxlike amid her blue cushions, for in that moment arose before him a like scene, when, as the sole watcher, he had stayed by her side.

But that was all passed now! Any fancied wrong he might have suffered he could afford to forgive, now that the woman for whom—when he thought that the hand of death would take her from him—his big heart was nigh breaking.

"My darling!" he said; and then, as he raised her fair head, from which the golden tresses had been partly shorn, pillowing it on his broad bosom, the while he let his large, white hand caress her soft face, from which the colour had again fled, leaving it white as marble. She knew she was still first in his love—in the heart she had so sorely tried!

"And notwithstanding all, Guy, my past folly and my sin, am I still yours, darling?" she asked, her eyes looking into his with a yearning for his affection she could not hide.

"Mine, only mine, sweetheart!" he answered. "I know poor Jack would wish it so, dearest. He left me Queenie, your child, and now mine!"

She was silent then, she could not speak, an unutterable joy showing itself in the blue eyes raised to his, now moist with the gentle tears of renewed happiness.

The time seemed but a few short moments, but Queenie declared they had been away over half-an-hour, and Madame Nevelle said she would not allow Blanche to talk any more; so, in obedience to those in power, Guy had but to obey, and, with a last kiss to the invalid, vacate the sick room.

CHAPTER VIII., AND LAST.

It was bitterly cold, and the November sky hung with dull grey clouds, prognosticating, the weather prophets said, a heavy fall of snow.

The swallows had long ago taken their departure, and all around Fernside dead brown leaves were scattered here and there, or lay in large heaps, where they had been driven by the cruel north-east wind.

But this day, as if in honour of the occasion, the sun had burst through the heavy pall which had previously hung around, and made the bright beads of the first frost to glitter like tiny diamonds beneath his ray.

There was even a crispness in the leaves which crumbled under one's foot, which even seemed more cheerful than stepping on them, dank and muddy as they had been; and when the village bells burst forth in a joyous peal they had quite an exhilarating effect on the

labourers going to their daily toil, only leaving off from the work on which they were engaged to rush to the gate to see the wedding folks when the carriages, with the grey horses and the coachmen with their favours, passed by.

The school-children had been made by the Vicar to line the path which led to the porch, notwithstanding that it had been determined by Guy to have no fuss whatever.

Nevertheless, there was a look of gratified pride on his happy face as he witnessed the gaze of admiration with which his bride was favoured as they passed along arm-in-arm in their midst, and the cheer which went up from those honest hearts when Queenie, in all her fresh young beauty, escorted by the young lawyer who acted as groomsman, followed in their steps.

"There'll be another wedding afore long," the old folks said, which brought the blushes to the faces of the youthful pair—a prediction, however, which was fulfilled when once again the spring-tide came round.

And then it was that Fernside was left wholly to the occupation of the elder couple, Queenie having made her home in the metropolis, only paying flying visits now and then, like a fleeting sunbeam within its walls.

Mrs. Scott has joined the majority, but old Scott is still there, having quite overcome his dislike to Guy's wife, who, he tells everyone, is the image of Mr. Mainwaring's lady, Miss Queenie's mother, and then he'll forget all about it and dangle Queenie's successor in the same way that years ago Queenie was dangled herself by him.

Blanche, now happy in the serenity of her home, in the possession of a good man's love, had almost ceased to remember that one dark page in her life's history, till one day she received from Paris a letter enclosing a paragraph cut from a daily paper, and then she read of the suicide of the man who had cast such a shadow over her young life.

[THE END.]

HIS TENANT'S DAUGHTER.

—10:—

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STRANGE WOMAN.

THURSTON RIVERS has been summoned home by telegraph.

"Your father is ill—come at once!" so ran the message, and in obedience to the call the young man travelled down to Devonshire by the next train.

This sudden demand for his presence has greatly interfered with Thurston's plans.

It has prevented him from obtaining another interview with Maggie, and at the time he leaves London, the private detective whom he has engaged to hunt up all that can be learned about Captain Earl's wife, has not yet made any report.

He is annoyed at this, because he would like to know the nature of the trouble connected with her mother, of which Maggie told him, although he is at the same time firmly resolved that it shall not come between them.

The journey, even by express, is a long one; and Thurston Rivers observes, on alighting from the train, that the groom who has come to meet him looks grave, as though he had put on a mournful face for the occasion.

"How is my father?" he asks, anxiously.

"He's alive, sir," is the reply, "or he was when I came from the Castle, but he was took bad yesterday in the park, and he's never spoke since."

Thurston asks no more, but takes the reins in his hands, and drives at a rapid pace to Boscombe Castle.

The rolling sea, the red cliffs, the beauty of the wooded hills as he leaves the shore, all fail to appeal to his sense of beauty.

His thoughts are with his father, whose

days he fears are numbered; and as he drives past the parish church, and his eyes wander to the quiet grave in which the body of his mother lies, he sighs heavily at the thought that very soon both of his parents will be lost to him.

Despite the bright sunshine, the song of birds, the gorgeous hue of many flowers, and the rich verdure with which the hills are clad, a feeling of gloom has settled upon Boacombe Castle, and Thurston Rivers is painfully conscious of this the very moment he enters it.

The servants walk on tiptoe and speak in hushed voices; for the master of the proud mansion lies ill unto death; and when, at his own request, Thurston is taken to his father's side, his worst fears are confirmed.

Sir Denbigh Rivers recognises his son, but he cannot speak to him; and oh! how hard he tries to make himself understood!

He makes signs that he would write, but the pencil falls from his powerless hands. If he has left anything undone it must for ever remain undone, and an expression of despair comes over his changed countenance, as he feels his own helplessness.

Lady Rivers and Ina are both in the room, the latter in tears, which she sheds silently, the former looking pale and anxious, but with a sort of resigned dejection about her, like a queen whose reign is well nigh over.

Whether the words which Sir Denbigh is so anxious to utter relate to his wife or his son, neither of them can ever know. The effort to make himself understood exhausts the stricken Baronet, and the doctor, who is by, signs to Thurston to leave the room.

He goes, his sister accompanying him, and for a little while Ina is too much agitated to converse with her brother, or to answer his many questions. At length she becomes calmer, and says,—

"You know papa has never been the same since that woman was murdered in our park. He used to worry and brood over it, and he grew suspicious of everybody. Lady Rivers hoped that our stay in the south of France with you would drive the morbid thoughts out of his mind, but they did not. Almost every day since our return he has gone to the 'Lovers' Walk' to look at the spot where the body of that woman was found."

"How singular!" ejaculates Thurston, with unconscious uneasiness.

"Yes, very singular," assents his sister. "But yesterday the park was open to the public, and papa going through the 'Lovers' Walk' met a woman who was also looking at that fatal spot. They spoke together. What passed between them nobody knows but themselves, but papa fell down in a fit, and the woman was coming swiftly to the house to tell us of his condition when she met one of the keepers. Papa was brought home, and he has been just as you have seen him ever since."

"And the woman?" asks Thurston.

"What has become of her?"

"I cannot tell you with any certainty," is the reluctant reply. "But my maid told me she had been seen in conversation with Captain Earl's servant, who is now at Cedar Cottage. His master is absent."

"Yes, I know," Thurston says, involuntarily. "I know where Captain Earl is to be found. But what can this woman have to do with the murder, or with my father, or with Captain Earl? It is altogether incomprehensible."

"It is very mysterious," assents Ina. "And I think the police have been very inert, or they would have laid their hands upon the murderer. I said so the other day to Colonel Haberton, and he was quite annoyed with me."

"Has the Colonel been here recently?" asks Thurston, with a look which his sister cannot all to understand.

"Yes, he was here last week," is the reply; "but he didn't stay long. He looks careworn and nervous. You can scarcely think how he is changed."

"And what of Percy?" asks her brother, with evident meaning.

She shrugs her shoulders as she replies,—
"He has not been here since Christmas. His father hinted something about his being engaged to one of his cousins."

"I don't believe that," asserts Thurston; "but if he is, you have yourself to blame."

And before Ina can protest that Percy Haberton is nothing to her, Thurston has walked out of the French windows into the garden, and is going up the valley towards the head of thecombe.

He had not left the house with any definite intention, but, as though influenced by a power more potent than his own will, he walks on and on, until he passes through the archway of branches which leads to the "Lovers' Walk."

Anyone who had seen this spot at the time the murder was committed, would scarcely recognise it now. Then the branches of the trees were bare, save for the moss that covered them. Then the ferns were few and far between, and the bright green of the shining laurel leaves were most welcome to the sight; while fallen leaves made a thick carpet on the ground, and filled the whole air with the smell of dying vegetation.

Now the spot presents a scene of almost tropical vegetation. The trees are full of foliage; ferns and wild flowers grow everywhere; the branches of the trees meet overhead; and Thurston, as he walks under them, is conscious of a feeling of oppression, as though from want of sufficient air he had difficulty in breathing.

Although he has come here half expecting to see someone, or to find something which shall help to solve the mystery that grows deeper and deeper, and that ever seems to be coming nearer to himself, he is startled to perceive a woman upon the garden seat, immediately opposite the spot where the victim of the murder had been found.

The park to-day is closed against strangers. She is therefore a trespasser, and his first impulse is to summon a keeper, with a silver whistle which he carries, to tell her so, and to warn her not to come here again.

She has caught sight of him, however, and before he can carry out his intention, she rises to her feet and approaches him. But he, not choosing to meet her in this gloomy walk, made darker now by the shades of evening which are drawing in, steps up upon the bank at the right, and makes for the side of the park which is close to the roadway.

The woman calls after him, but he does not heed her.

From what Ina has told him, he has no doubt that this woman is the same who met his father yesterday, and he is quite determined that if she has anything unpleasant to say to him, she shall do it in such daylight as is still left, and not in a place so dark that he cannot see her face.

There is a small, almost disused gate here, opening out upon the road, of which he happens to have the key; and seating himself upon the low bough of a tree, he lights a cigarette and begins to smoke.

A glance at the woman has convinced him that she is not a lady. His mental comment is that "it is like her impudence—climbing over the fences into the park;" for she could not have passed the gates of any of the lodges. And he determines, if she addresses him, to listen to all she has to say, and be as chary of his own words as possible.

That she is like a bird of ill-omen he feels very sure, and if it would not look like cowardice on his part, he would resolutely refuse to meet her.

But she means to meet him, for she comes on, slowly and toilomely, panting as she ascends the steep ground, and almost out of breath with her exertions when she is within speaking distance.

Thurston appears not to see her, and he does not turn his head until she says, huskily,—

"Mr. Rivers, I think, sir?"

He fixes his eyes upon her steadily for a moment before he replies, coldly,—
"That is my name."

The woman before him is middle-aged, and has never been beautiful.

She is not badly dressed, but she looks vulgar; and although her manner is fawning and servile, the gleam of her vixenish-looking eyes, and the hard lines round her sensual mouth, show very plainly that she can, when roused, be a veritable virago.

Involuntarily, as Thurston Rivers looks at her, his thoughts travel back to that morning, now nearly six months ago, when, after catching a first glimpse of Margaret Earl, he, with Percy Haberton, encountered the woman who was in the evening found murdered in the park; and he knows, as by intuition, that these two were in some way connected.

But the woman whom he had met upon the road had once held the position of a lady; he and young Haberton had both decided that. The almost courtly manner in which she had bowed to them; her speech, and the traces of former beauty, all recur to his mind now, and convince him that the woman before him must always have been of a lower order.

"I was so sorry your father was took bad yesterday, sir," the woman says in a cringing tone; "just as we was coming to terms, too! Is the poor gentleman any better, sir?"

The words and the tone in which they are uttered, irritate Thurston Rivers beyond expression; so much so, that if this creature were not a woman, he would fly at her throat and shake her.

His father make terms with such a wretch as this?

The very suggestion is an insult to the man who is lying in his proud mansion with the shadow of death hanging over him.

Finding that an answer is expected of him, Thurston says,—

"No."

His tone makes the woman jump. It convinces her also that whining and cringing here is of no use; a gleam of malice comes into her eyes. She straightens herself, and says, in a changed tone,—

"I'm come down in these parts, sir, to find my mistress—Mrs. Walsingham as was, Mrs. Walsingham Earl I 'spose you'd now call her!"

The shot tells.

Mr. Rivers perceptibly shrinks, as though he had received a blow. But though that involuntary movement betrayed him, his voice is cold and haughty enough as he asks,—

"Well, what is that to me?"

The woman is disappointed. She thought she had scored a greater success; she loses her temper, and says, hotly,—

"It's this to you, Sir. She was murdered in this park—murdered just opposite the spot where you see'd me sitting."

"Well!" he asks, looking at her steadily; "what do you mean to infer by that?"

"I mean to infer that somebody murdered her!" cries the woman, fast losing the slight hold she has upon her own temper.

"That was self evident," returns the gentleman, coolly.

"Somebody who'd a motive for getting her out of his way," the woman continues, with sinister meaning.

"Whoever killed the poor creature must have had some motive for doing it, I suppose," returns Thurston, thoughtfully.

"And I know who that man was," asserts the strange woman, in a manner that is positively menacing.

"Then tell the police, not me," says Thurston, rising to his feet, and throwing away the end of his cigarette.

"And now let me give you a caution," he adds sternly. "This park is private property; by favour of the owner a portion of it is open to the public one day in each week. If you are ever found here again, except on the public day, you will be prosecuted. You can leave by this gate now; and if you have any criminal

or disgraceful secrets to tell, you must go elsewhere with them; you will find no market here."

Then he unlocks the gate, throws it open, and waits for her to pass out.

But the woman is too furious at the failure of her scheme to get hold of a large sum of money to be prudent; and she begins to abuse him and his friends right roundly, to call them murderers and thieves, and to assert that he cannot care much for "little Maggie" if he won't spend a few paltry pounds to save her father from the hangman, and to shield her mother's memory.

Words which cut Thurston Rivers to the quick, for the sake of her whom he loves. But he knows that if he gives this monster in female form one killing, yields one iota to her demands, she will be like a vampire, feeding upon his heart's blood, using all her terrors upon him until she has drained from his life every drop of happiness.

"Will you go?" he asks sternly, unheeding her threats.

Her answer is another volley of abuse; and he puts his whistle to his lips, and a loud, long, shrill cry echoes through the woods; then is responded to, and he blows again.

The woman is frightened—sobbed all in an instant.

"I'm going," she says in her thick, husky voice; "and sorry enough you'll be for this the next time you hear of me."

Then she passes through the gate, just as a couple of gamekeepers come running towards them.

"See that that woman never enters the park again, on any pretext whatever," says Thurston Rivers, sternly.

Then he walks back to the Castle, where his father still lies in the same speechless condition.

But he can guess now what his father wants to say to him, and his heart sinks like lead in his breast.

Never has Maggie seemed so far from him, never before have the sins of others stood like an impassable gulf between them.

So the days and the weeks pass by.

Sir Denbigh Rivers lingers on, surprising his physicians by the way in which he clings to life, and, lest the end may come at any hour, Thurston is unable to leave the Castle.

Maggie has warned him not to write to her, he cannot go.

The violent woman who had appeared so strangely seems to have gone away as suddenly as she came, and if she has done anything to carry out her threats, Thurston Rivers knows nothing of it.

Of the time he can scarcely keep any count, the days seem so like each other.

Ina is as silent and depressed as himself. Her father's death will make a great change for her; and it may be that she thinks sadly of the love she has thrown away, and which she has too late learnt to value.

Thurston has received the report from the detective whom he employed to hunt up all that could be learnt about Margaret's mother. In his present state of feeling he cannot trust himself to read it.

He fears that if his father recovers the use of his speech, he will try to extort a promise from him—a promise, which, if given, will cast a blight over his whole life.

But the promise is never demanded. For several days past Sir Denbigh Rivers has been in a comatose condition, and from this he never rallies.

When the great change comes the nurse who watches him cannot quite tell, but come it does; and on the morning that the news of Captain Earl's arrest on the charge of "wilful murder" is ringing throughout the kingdom Thurston Rivers is summoned to what is now the death-chamber of his father.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING.

ON this particular morning, when her father's name is on the tongues of thousands, Margaret Earl sits alone, pale and heavy-eyed, as though many hours of the night had been passed in weeping.

The excitement she went through last evening, the temptation she successfully resisted, tried her greatly; and this has been succeeded by a feeling of desolation, as though she had thrown away her last chance of happiness, as though life for her must henceforth be loveless and lonely.

She wonders where her father is, but she is not alarmed at his absence.

Captain Earl has not been accustomed to tell his daughter where he is going or when he will return, and therefore she is not at all surprised at having to eat her breakfast alone.

It has been Captain Vincent's custom, to come over directly after breakfast, to smoke with her father and discuss the current topics of the day.

But this morning he does not come, and Maggie naturally enough attributes his absence to soreness of heart at her refusal to marry him.

She seldom, if ever, reads a newspaper, and now the *Times* lies upon the table unopened, containing in its pages a tale that would startle her.

About twelve o'clock, two men, dressed in private clothes, but with the stamp of Scotland-yard upon them, knock at the door of Cardova Lodge, ask for "Miss Earl," and are admitted to her presence.

The officers of the law, accustomed as they are to painful scenes, are struck by the beauty and youth of the fair girl before them, and the principal one says, respectfully enough,—

"We don't want to inconvenience you, miss, but we must search the house and premises."

"My father is not at home," says Maggie, not understanding them.

"We know that he's not at home, miss," is the answer. "To put it plainly, he's in prison. May I trouble you for the keys of the boxes and drawers and cupboards, or would you like to go over the house with us?"

"I don't understand you!" exclaims the girl, becoming deathly pale. "Why is my father in prison? What has he done? Why do you want to search the house?"

The men look at each other.

Her agitation and ignorance are genuine enough; and after a word together, the spokesman says bluntly, though kindly enough,—

"Captain Earl was arrested yesterday afternoon at Victoria station for the murder of his wife on the fourth of December last in Boscombe Park, Devonshire. He's in the House of Detention now, and it's our painful duty, miss, to search the house for anything that may come in as evidence."

Margaret does not faint nor scream.

She seems like a girl suddenly turned to stone. Mechanically she gives the men all the keys that are in her possession, then clasps her hands before her, stunned by the suddenness of the blow.

The men observe that she makes no assertion of her belief in her father's innocence. If they could look deep into her heart they would know that she has no such faith.

It will be remembered that she first heard of her mother's death from her aunt, who spoke of it with satisfaction, but who could give no details, saying she had heard of the event from her brother; so that Captain Earl seemed to be the only person who knew of the death of his wife.

Then, again, Margaret remembers the bitter tone which her father has always used in speaking of his divorced wife; but of the manner or time of her death she knows nothing. Through her father's care, the story of the Boscombe Park murder has never reached her ears.

The men search the house from garret to cellar, but find nothing. They turn over letters and papers; they are particularly careful to examine Captain Earl's linen, for it will be remembered that the unfortunate woman was strangled with two wide strips of fine calico tied together, the inference being that the murderer had torn up a good shirt for the purpose.

But Captain Earl's linen is intact; not very new, but with name, number, and date upon each of the articles, so that if one undergarment were missing, that one could be known and traced.

The search, so far, has yielded nothing, except a diary written in cypher, which the men take away with them.

It is not until the police officers are gone, and Mrs. Brown, the cook, comes to express both curiosity and commiseration, that Maggie shakes off the stupor that has come over her, tries to realise what has happened, and to think of what she ought to do.

In this appalling trouble her thoughts turn at once to her early playfellow, Captain Vincent, but he has not been near the house this morning; and, after what passed between them last evening, she doubts whether or not she can send for him.

She cannot ask the opinion of Mrs. Brown, but the good woman has already sent round for the Captain, and has learnt that he went to London by an early train this morning.

"I suppose my father will be able to write to me?" Maggie asks, helplessly.

And the old woman, who has had some painful experiences in the criminal courts through the wickedness of her only son, says promptly,—

"Yes, he can write to you, miss; and no doubt Captain Vincent is gone to him. There's nothing to be done in a hurry; you must just wait. I s'pose you've got enough money to go along with?"

"Oh, yes!" Maggie replies; "but I do so wish Captain Vincent would come!"

Never before has she waited and wished for the appearance of anyone as she has for the coming of her father's old friend. But the hours of the day pass slowly on. Still he does not make his appearance, and it is past four o'clock in the afternoon when, observing the unread newspaper for the first time, Maggie opens it, and reads,—

"Captain Walsingham Earl, formerly of the 11th Regiment, was arrested yesterday afternoon on the charge of having wilfully murdered his wife on the fourth of last December, in Boscombe Park, the property of Sir Denbigh Rivers. For those who have forgotten the details of the 'Boscombe Park Tragedy,' we reprint the subjoined account."

Then follows a description of the finding of the body of the murdered woman, the inquest, and the open verdict.

There is no comment made upon the matter, the writer of the paragraphs confines himself simply to a statement of facts; and Margaret Earl, reading all this for the first time, reading of the cruel murder and the hasty arrest all in one column of the same paper, is naturally unable to perceive any gleam of hope that her father is innocent of the crime of which he is charged.

The circumstance which strikes her so forcibly is that the woman who was murdered in Boscombe Park was buried as a nameless outcast, nobody being able to recognise her; and yet, less than a month afterwards, Captain Earl could tell his sister with absolute certainty that his wife was dead.

One circumstance dovetails into another with fatal exactitude; and Margaret Earl, piecing this dreadful puzzle together, sits silent and helpless under the weight of her accumulated misery.

It is past six o'clock when Captain Vincent at length makes his appearance; and she, forgetting all that has passed between them, rises impulsively to meet him, and, resting upon his shoulder in a passion of grief, she sobs,—

"Oh, Topps! what shall I do? what shall I do?"

He does not clasp her in his arms as he would have done but for that explanation yesterday; but he takes her hand kindly, leads her to a chair, and says, as cheerfully as he can,—

"Cheer up, little woman! you must not be so down-hearted! I have seen your father to-day, and he is certain of proving his innocence. He says he took you to Exeter to an afternoon performance at the theatre the day this dreadful affair occurred."

This tax upon her memory helps, in a measure, to restore the stricken girl to a sense of her position, and she thinks for a moment, then she replies promptly,—

"Yes, papa did take me to Exeter the second day after I came to Cedar Cottage. We left about twelve o'clock at noon, and he was with me until we returned about nine in the evening."

"What was the day of the month?" asks Vincent, gravely.

"I don't remember," is the reply; "but we can find out. I had been home one clear day—our school broke up a little earlier than usual; I can easily find you the date."

"Well, it doesn't matter now," returns Vincent, with unusual earnestness. "I have seen your father, and he is dreadfully cut up at his own position—not that he will condescend to recognise any peril in it; but he is intensely humiliated at his family affairs being made public."

"Poor papa!" sighs Maggie; "what can I do for him?"

"You will have to save him, I fear," is the answer. "If, as seems probable, his only defence is an *alibi*, you will have to come forward, and others will have to be found to confirm your story."

"Do you mean that I shall have to go into Court?" asks Maggie, recoiling in dismay.

"I am afraid so," is the answer. "But let us talk about something else. I met a young gentleman coming to the house as I went away last evening."

"Yes, the Earl of Melcombe," answers Maggie, indifferently.

"And he came to the prison to-day as I was leaving it," continues Vincent; "I heard him ask for your father."

"But why? How good of him!" exclaims Maggie, with emotion.

"Was he not the one you hoped to see?" asks Vincent, nervously.

"No, oh no!" is the quick response. "I told him what I had told you, only I had to be more explicit, because I had allowed him to expect more. If he went to papa to-day it must have been to offer to help him."

"I am glad of it," returns the soldier, gravely; "but it is very sad for you, Maggie, very sad indeed! Have you made up your mind what you will do?"

"No; except that I had better stay here in case papa wants me," is the reply. "Has anything happened to-day?"

"Yes; your father was brought before the magistrate, and was remanded for a week," is the answer, "and you will be having a lawyer here from him to-morrow. His case is in good hands. Shall I telegraph for your aunt to come to you?"

"No; she hated my mother!" is the reply, "and I could not bear to hear her talk about her."

Vincent understands her, and says soothingly,—

"Yes, you are right. Mrs. Brown will take care of you; I will come in again to-morrow morning, and you must not worry about this more than you can help."

So he goes away, and Maggie is left to bear the burden of her grief alone.

But the next morning comfort comes to her from a quarter whence she least expects it.

A black-edged letter is handed to her, the writing of which is strange, and she tears it open with the dread of further evil.

It is brief, is dated Boscombe Castle, and is as follows:—

"MY DARLING MAGGIE,

"My dear father died this morning, and we are in great grief in consequence. I cannot come to town for nearly a week; but as soon as I can get away from here I shall come to you. I have just seen your father's name in the newspaper—there is a great mistake somewhere; but be of good cheer, it will all come right. Keep up your spirits, dearest, for the sake of your devoted,

"THURSTON RIVERS."

What words can describe the ecstatic happiness which the first reading of this letter gives to Maggie?

"Thurston loves her! Thurston is coming to her!"

This is the message she reads. This is all of which she thinks. Her mourning is turned into rejoicing. Her constancy has not been in vain; and he, who is the king of men to her, is coming—coming soon to claim her as his own!

So she presses the letter to her heart and kisses it, and dreams bright visions of future bliss; and then, after a while, she reads the letter again, and sees what she had scarcely observed before, that Sir Denbigh Rivers is dead!

Dead!

How that cold word strikes like a hand of ice upon the heart!

She can scarcely imagine the portly, red-faced baronet, so important in his manner, so kind-hearted and good-natured, so loud in his tones, lying calm, and white, and silent in the awful majesty of death.

Her own joy is hushed as she thinks of Thurston and Ina made orphans, of Lady Rivers now a widow, and of the sad change that must have come over the whole household.

But the letter contains personal comfort. Thurston speaks of the charge against her father as though he knew it to be unfounded.

He tells her to be of good cheer, that all will come right; and for the first time since she heard of her father's arrest, she not only hopes, but half believes, that he is innocent of the crime imputed to him.

And yet, if he is innocent, how came he to know that her mother was dead?

That is the question that torments her. The victim of that murder was buried as one who had never had a name; nobody confessed to having recognised her, and yet her father could tell his sister that his wife was dead!

These are the thoughts, unconfessed to anyone, that poison her peace, that come serpent-like and whisper doubt in her heart, even when convinced by the similarity of time and date, that on the day the murder was committed her father was with her the whole time.

"If he did not do it he knew of it," whispers the fiend in her ear, "and to shield a murderer is to share in his crime!"

But she would not breathe this thought for worlds, though it torments her day and night, and takes from her the comfort which her lover's letter, and his faith in her father's innocence, would give her.

Captain Vincent comes in soon after breakfast, and at once perceives a change in Maggie.

"You have had good news," he asserts, promptly.

And she, blushing, replies,—

"Yes; I have had a letter from Mr. Rivers, from Boscombe Castle. His father is dead, and he cannot come to London for nearly a week, but he speaks of papa as though he knew he were innocent."

And she reads the passage from the letter to him.

"Ah!" says Vincent, with a sigh, "I believe he will have to be one of the witnesses if this matter ever comes to trial."

Then, with an effort to banish all trace of emotion from his voice, he asks,—

"Is not this the gentleman from whom your father was hiding you?"

"Yes," is the low reply.

"And he is true to you?"

Margaret makes no reply, but a soft smile irradiates her countenance, and gives to it a tenfold beauty.

No need to ask if Thurston still loves her while she holds this letter in her hand and smiles like that; and Charlie Vincent turns away, walks to the window, and stands there for awhile, struggling with the pain in his heart, unconscious, until now, of how much hope he had cherished, that Maggie, deserted by her more wealthy and youthful admirers, would, when all this anxiety was over, come to his arms for comfort.

That hope is for ever crushed. Henceforth, he must regard her only as a friend, and he has half turned from the window to say some kind and friendly words to her, when he sees a woman at the garden-gate, the sight of whom fills him with righteous anger.

"Maggie," he says, promptly, turning to the girl, and speaking as though she had been his own daughter, "here is a woman coming to your door whom you must not see. She is one of the vilest women of whom I have ever heard. She was your mother's maid, but for her your mother might have been alive now—happy and honoured. It is she who is pursuing your father with fiendish malignity, and who has caused his arrest. Promise me that you will not speak to her or listen to anything she may want to say?"

"I do promise," is the answer; "but what shall I do?" for the knock had sounded at the door. "Shall I tell the servant to deny me to her?"

"No; go to your own room and let her see me instead," is the reply. "She knows a secret that may save your father, and I must get it from her if I can!"

Maggie makes a sign of assent and leaves the room swiftly, just as the maid is about to open the front door.

(To be continued.)

A COMPLETE CURE.

—:—

I WAS preparing to leave Paris for Nice, proposing to spend the winter there, as I had done for several seasons in succession, finding the climate admirably suited to my invalid aches and habits.

A few days before my proposed departure I received a letter from a widowed sister, and, owing to carelessness somewhere, the missive had been considerably delayed.

She wrote in a very excited manner about what she called "an unfortunate entanglement" into which her only son had slipped; and I was greatly surprised when I found that her fine phrase meant that the boy wanted to get married, and that she objected to his choice from mere worldly reasons, which appeared to me trivial and contemptible.

Englishmen seem to have become sadly Continentalised since I grew up! In my young days a fellow married the girl of his choice—if she and hers were respectable—without opposition from anybody, and money would have been the last thing he thought about, expecting to support his own wife as one of the natural duties of man.

But here was my sister declaring that her son must not follow his own inclinations—must forget the girl he loved—simply because she was a poor school-teacher, and wed a fortune equal to his own, and a social position to match.

"I shall send Clarence to you at once, to spend the winter," she wrote, "in the hope that he will meet, in Paris or Nice, some brilliant well-bred girl who will make him speedily forget the passing fancy which has so sorely disquieted me. A man can make no social mistake so terrible as that of marrying beneath him."

Confound the woman! Had she forgotten that, less than thirty years ago, when she was

Jane Hardwick, she taught music, and I was a poor clerk in a lawyer's office?

I made a fortune, and she married one; but I had no idea that, during our long years of separation, she had grown such an outrageous snob.

I was groaning and anathematising over her letter, when I heard a tremendous racket in the antechamber as of heavy luggage being deposited on the floor, and then my old servant's voice in eager expostulation.

"A thousand pardons, monsieur," said Antoine, softly opening the door; "there is a young gentleman who insists on entering, though I have assured him that monsieur is invisible."

"Such nonsense, Uncle Richard—with you there as large as life and twice as natural!" called a gay young voice from behind the hangings; and a great fellow, with wide blue eyes and closely-cropped auburn hair, rushed into the room and shook both my hands till the breakfast-tray on the table before me rattled and the cup and plates danced a jig.

"Bless me!" said I, "what a high-wind of a nephew! I suppose you are my nephew—Clare or Clara—or whatever sweet maidenly name your mother elects to give you."

"Now, that's shabby," quoth he, laughing. "The mater will call me 'Clarence'; but, to everybody else, I'm 'Dick Godwin'—including you, Uncle Richard, if you please. And now, since you are so very pressing—thanks, I think I will take a cup of coffee and some of that Strasburg pie; for I had a beastly breakfast at the station, and am as hungry as a hunter."

The boy's manner pleased me. In ten minutes, Antoine brought him a comfortable meal, and we were chatting as cordially as possible, though I had not seen him since he was a little chap in knickerbockers; and, before the day ended, we were the best friends possible, and, luckily, old Antoine took a fancy to the handsome fellow, and declared that his French was worthy of a Parisian.

I deferred my journey for a fortnight, and actually went about showing my nephew "the sights," and found him much better up in historical and general knowledge than I had ventured to hope, knowing how his mother had petted and indulged him.

Not one word did he say, not a single allusion did he make to that "unfortunate entanglement" which had led to his expatriation, though I gave him every opportunity to do so; and, finally, I made up my mind either that the love-wounds of a man of two-and-twenty were easily healed, else that the whole thing had been a plot on his part to induce his mother to let him come abroad.

In due time we reached Nice, the most harmonious companion imaginable, and, after introducing him into the best "society set"—as I suppose my sister would have expressed it—I left him free.

One day, a Polish lady—old Madame Kisa-leff—invited a select party to hear her read an original comedy; and I could not refuse to go.

The little comedy was so clever that I forgot Dick till I chanced, at the close of the third act, to see him come out of the conservatory with an odd-looking woman, and when I got a chance to ask him who she was, he surprised me by growing quite red, evidently vexed by my question.

"Have you forgotten Madame de la Croix?" he asked.

"I am shocked at my own remissness, but I must confess that I have," said I. "Where did I ever meet her?"

"The first time was on the Admiral's flagship, when the squadron was lying at Villafraunce," rejoined Dick.

"Oh, yes—now I remember—a daughter too, was there not?"

"Yes," he answered, shortly, growing still redder.

It had been on the tip of my tongue to add: "A queer lot," but I repressed the remark.

I gathered from old friends that lovely Mademoiselle de la Croix had been such for a

goodly number of seasons—in fact, could not be a day under twenty-seven, though wonderfully beautiful still and singularly youthful in appearance.

I learned that she might have married advantageously several times, only that no prospective son-in-law would hear of the mother's remaining near her daughter; for, though keeping a certain position through her name and her relatives, energetic people did not hesitate to pronounce the countess "a regular sharper."

Before long, it came to my ears that sympathising people were saying outright that it was plain my nephew meant to marry the fascinating Gabrielle, and to add that it was a huge pity.

The short winter was passing—strangers were beginning to think of leaving Nice—and I ventured to suggest to Dick a brief trip among the Pyrenees before returning north. Then the youth found his tongue, and boldly announced to me that he proposed to marry Mademoiselle de la Croix without loss of time, and desired me to write and broach the subject to his mother.

That evening I called on Madame de la Croix, and my request for a private interview was granted, though I fancy the daughter assisted thereat, snugly encoined within a curtained recess at the further end of the little drawing-room.

After a fine display of mutual mendacity about the pleasure of meeting, and a brief talk about the doings in our small world of Nice, the Countess smilingly declared that she was certain my amiable visit was due to some especially happy reason, and then we speedily engaged in a polite duel of words as sharp and polished as two Damascus blades.

I told her how much honoured I should feel by the proposed alliance, but could not conceal from her tender maternal heart my fear—I might say certainty—of my sister's deep-rooted prejudice against her son's taking a foreign wife, as well as of her desire to see him reach years of discretion before he should think of taking one at all.

"But she will never be able to resist the strength of this grand passion—this first outburst of a noble heart—so fully shared, too, by his beautiful betrothed!" cried Madame, enthusiastically.

"Alas, madame," said I, with deep pathos, "the boy was sent to me a few months ago, to find a cure for an equally absorbing passion—you see how speedily he has found it."

Tableau of surprise on madame's part, and an indignant rustle among the curtains of the alcove.

"Our dear Richard, however, is his mother's only son—and has, too, an independent fortune, I think," the Countess soon recovered sufficiently to make answer, and now the alcove-curtains fell in stiff folds suggestive of eager listening.

"An only child," I amended, "but her husband's will left my sister complete mistress of his fortune—which, after all, is not so very large. She is a determined woman and young enough to marry again if her son should oppose her."

"We can only rely on Richard's faithfulness and your kindly aid," said madame, coaxingly. "Surely you will help the dear children to be happy—you will do your very best?"

"I promise that faithfully," I rejoined, as I bent over the hand extended; but it occurred to me that our ideas as to what was best might materially differ.

Of course I wrote to my sister without delay.

"I can see you are opposed to my marriage, uncle," Dick said, frankly; "but that is because you don't know my Gabrielle! Her mother is a woman of the world, but she is an angel of innocence! I hate madame sometimes—I can never see Gabrielle alone—she forces her to go out, evening after evening—I am never allowed more than one dance—oh, it's maddening!"

So madame was playing social propriety, to

drive my boy still more insane, and I should alienate his affection if I tried to open his eyes to the reputation of both mother and daughter.

My sister's letters reached us in due season. Her refusal was not only decisive, but somewhat impolite. After that, for nearly a fortnight, I saw very little of Dick, and at last, one day, a friend said to me,—

"Isn't your nephew playing rather heavily?"

I made some vague reply, and, when I got home, asked my old valet what was going on.

For answer, Antoine placed in my hand a copy of the Nice journal, and I read that, the day before, one of the roulette-tables had been closed at three in the afternoon, owing to the great gain of a lucky young Englishman. I knew that closing the table meant the maximum of loss allowed for one table in a single day.

I went to Dick's room and waited there till he came in to dress for dinner. He looked worn and tired, but was in high spirits, and gave me a warm greeting. I showed him the newspaper, and asked if he were the lucky player.

"Yes, Uncle Richard," he replied, unhesitatingly. "You see, fortune favours the daring. My mother will not hear reason, and the countess will not give me Gabrielle unless I have at least a competency. The tables are just wonderful; every number I choose comes up invariably! I hate play, and shall stop short just as soon as I reach the exact sum Madame de la Croix declares necessary. You would never believe how rich I am already," he added, laughing excitedly. "I am obliged to pretend to put my gains in the bank, but that old trunk is my safe. My father used it in his business days."

He took a queer-shaped key out of his purse, and unlocked the great trunk; then, with another still odder little instrument, opened the inner casing of the box and displayed a number of French bank notes of the highest denominations.

"How much?" I asked.

"Nearly three hundred thousand francs, and I've not been over a dozen times in all. Think of it—almost twelve thousand pounds!"

"Dear boy, aren't you a little mad with all this excitement and anxiety? Would your father have approved?" I questioned.

Then I stopped, remembering that his father ought to have made Dick study a profession, learn business, or else to have left him means of support independent of his mother's caprices or prejudices.

"It doesn't seem right. I feel that, Uncle Richard," he replied, with one arm on my shoulder. "But I can't live without Gabrielle, and there is no other way for me to win her. If I delay her mother will force her to marry some rich man. There are several ready."

"But suppose you lose next time?"

"Well, well, then my hopes must go! Don't reason with me; don't ask me to give her up. It maddens me!"

I am not a Solon, but I do know that expostulation with a young man in that state of mind is sure to drive him desperate. I let my nephew alone.

Three days passed, and then, at the unholy hour of one in the morning, when Antoine was trying to read me to sleep, we were disturbed by the abrupt entrance of Dick into my bed-chamber.

First he hugged me till I was breathless, then he performed a waltz-dance about my prostrate form, in order to celebrate his marvellous good fortune and his last—"his very last"—visit to the gaming-tables.

The maximum gain at one time—five hundred thousand francs—was his! I could scarcely believe my ears at first. When I did I felt sure that the lad's future was wrecked. How could he resist the spell of the fatal board after this?

I did not preach or argue. I tried to keep

him all night, but he had friends waiting—he must rejoice them.

"I shall leave this little pile with you, Uncle Richard," he said, drawing out the great wallet stuffed with bank-notes. "Nobody will suspect that it is here, and I shall feel perfectly safe."

Antoine, who, of course, had assisted at the conference, counted the bank-notes aloud, agreed to take charge of it for the night, and Dick went off to his companions.

Antoine and I exchanged our forebodings that this wonderful luck would, in some way, cause the boy's ruin. Then my faithful servant left me.

I slept very late the next morning, and when I rang for Antoine a servant appeared, to say that my valet had gone out.

While I was taking my belated coffee, Dick rushed in, literally wild with delight. He had already seen his fair Gabrielle, and communicated the wonderful news. For some reason she and her mother had not been to Monaco on the previous night.

He had found the mother most gracious and accommodating. She had consented to accompany Gabrielle to Switzerland, where the marriage could take place legally without the formality of my sister's consent.

"She judges my mother by herself, and is confident that in time we shall be forgiven, and I believe so, too," cried Dick, joyously.

"And what investment do you propose to make of your money?" I asked.

"Oh, the Countess has offered to arrange all that. She knows some of the most prominent financiers of Paris," said Dick. "And there must be no delay. I can tell you the whole truth, uncle. Gabrielle is afraid, if we wait, that her mother may withdraw her consent. There's some new, awfully rich fellow on hand!"

Good heavens! Was I ever so young and innocent?

"I'll ring for Antoine," pursued Dick, "and get my valuable wallet—I must deposit it at La Seur's banks."

In his energy, he nearly pulled the bell-rope down, and several servants obeyed the summons in hot haste, but could only say that Antoine had not yet returned.

"Very odd he should go out so early and not be back yet?" said I.

"But what did he do with the cash, uncle?" questioned Dick.

"Why, he took it to his chamber, you know—"

Dick was gone before I could finish my sentence.

Ten minutes later he stood again in my room, as pale a man as ever I looked at, and flung himself into a chair.

"What is it, Dick? What is the matter?" I cried. "Has anything happened to Antoine? He's not been well lately—"

"He is gone!" Dick broke in with a gasp. "Where? What?"

"Decamped—this faithful fellow, this pearl of servants—and taken my money with him," Dick continued, with a dreadful little laugh.

"If the Countess will only wait—oh, I may win Gabrielle yet!"

Then he hid his face in his hands and groaned, and I inelegantly blew my nose in sympathy.

Then such a busy morning as we spent! The police proved itself as inefficient as it always does at an emergency in every country; and all we succeeded in doing was to waste no end of money in telegrams and messengers.

Well, the robber—I may as well tell it here—was at last traced to Genoa. He had there taken ship for Buenos Ayres, which charitable country does not extradite robbers and swindlers.

Nothing so quickly planned was ever more neatly accomplished than this evasion; and, between sorrow for Dick and annoyance at the loss of an invaluable servant, I was in the depths of distress.

Dick went to see the Countess, but evi-

dently met with slight consolation; for he returned broken and depressed.

"I suppose she is wise to look out for our mutual warfare," he said; "but it is tough that she won't let me see and console Gabrielle. She'll cry her beautiful eyes out, I know."

"What are you going to do, my boy?" I asked.

"Go back to Monte Carlo, to-morrow, and try over again," said he, sadly; "though it is hardly possible that my great luck should repeat itself. I tried to make the Countess content with the sum still left; but she says that, much as she loves us both and longs to see us happy, she cannot consent to any imprudence. I suppose she is right; but it's very hard."

Persuasions were useless—the next day he went off to Monaco. The afternoon was heavenly; all the world was driving along the seashore, and I drove there too: and whom should I see but Madame de la Croix and the fair Gabrielle perched on the mail-coach of a Brazilian who had lately been astonishing Nice by his lavish expenditure.

At the spot where all the carriages halted to hear music from a good band, I got out, meaning to go and salute the two ladies, but was stopped by my old friend Jarvis, who had reached town the night before.

"Anyone new and exciting here?" he asked, after a little talk.

"No—unless it is those two ladies yonder," said I, pointing out the Countess and her daughter.

"New? They?" cried Jarvis. "Why, it is fully ten years since the Benjamin business—the girl was just seventeen then—and there have been several affairs since, though none in which she showed her hand so plainly."

Here was a "find" for me, if Jarvis knew what he was talking about! He was in a hurry, too, to join some friends; but I made him promise to dine with me that evening, and he arrived punctually at half-past seven.

We had just begun our soup when a despatch was brought into me. It was from Dick, and contained these words:

"Telegraph Smith to give me five thousand francs."

He had already lost his twelve thousand pounds, I thought, and wanted to tempt fate with a thousand more. Well, if he lost that he might be cured of play, and of another infatuation into the bargain. I telegraphed the money, and these lines to himself:

"Join me at dessert at ten o'clock."

Anxious as I was, my old acquaintance proved so amusing that the appointed hour arrived before I was aware; and, to my surprise—for, I confess, I had not expected him—my boy appeared, pale, heavy-eyed, and owning that he had had no dinner. Over his supper, for which he showed little appetite, he made acquaintance with Jarvis. Then we wandered out toward the Casino, and the glorious moonlight tempted us to seek the Promenade des Anglais and take seats on the terrace of the Blue Bath House.

I was determined that Dick should hear the story in regard to Gabrielle de la Croix, to which Jarvis had alluded in the morning, and about which I had just begun to question him when my nephew joined us at table.

"Come, Jarvis," I said, abruptly, "I want to hear what it was that happened to poor old Benjamin. I remember him very well. He always went about in a wheeled chair."

"Exactly. He lost the use of his legs from a hurt he got while rescuing his mother from a burning house."

"Yes—a splendid fellow!" said I. "A Jew of the best sort—everybody liked him. Luckily, he had a great fortune to make the burden of his life a little easier. So some woman was cruel enough to deal him a worse hurt than the physical accident had been?"

A touch of my foot against his warned Jarvis—whose intuitions were fairly feminine in their quickness—that I did not wish the woman's name mentioned.

"A good deal worse," Jarvis replied. "Before that, in spite of his terrible misfortune, he was the most cheerful old fellow alive—used to go everywhere in his wheeled chair, to dinners and balls, and everybody was glad to have him. Well, little Miss Fuss and her mother came to Nice. Heavens! how pretty the girl was! Barely seventeen, fresh as a rose, and looked as modest as a violet, and was harder at bottom than Lady Macbeth!"

"I've seen specimens of that genus," said I.

"But never one of that age to equal her, I'll be bound; and then she had her mother, who was wickedness incarnate, to help her," pursued Jarvis. "Well, Fuss devoted herself to Benjamin: used to sit by him at balls instead of dancing; was always at the side of his chair on the promenade and every other public place."

"The mother pretended to be dreadfully vexed at what she called the girl's 'insanity'; but the matter went on till poor Benjamin really believed Fuss loved him; in fact, she told him so. Of course, madame wouldn't hear of an engagement; but her daughter insisted, and it came to that in the end."

"Benjamin made his future bride a large settlement. Why, the wedding-clothes were nearly ready, and he had given her a reasonable fortune in jewels."

Jarvis paused for an instant, and I saw that Dick—who, at first, had seemed to pay no attention—was listening eagerly.

"And what was the dénouement?" I asked.

"Oh, fit for one of Sardou's plays," said Jarvis. "Just then, young Pearce came down from Paris—one of that rich Devonshire family, you know—and, the first time he set eyes on the girl lost his head completely. He went perfectly mad over her; and, though I and a few others knew that Pearce had spent his own fortune and was dependent on his aunt, we wouldn't say a word: for we pitied poor Benjamin, and wanted the girl to show her hand."

"And she did?" I inquired.

"Completely," said Jarvis, in a satisfied tone. "She threw over Benjamin, but kept all the pearls and diamonds; and the poor old fellow went away nearly brokenhearted, but a good deal wiser. Then, suddenly, Pearce's aunt swooped down into Nice and carried her nephew off, and pretty Miss Fuss fell between two stools. She has had many disappointments since; but I think that was the worst defeat, both for madame and Gabrielle."

After all, he had spoken the name. I expected to see Dick spring at his throat; but the young man rose, said a hasty good-night, and sauntered away.

The next morning, just after I was dressed, Dick came into my room and handed me five bank-notes, each of a thousand francs.

"So you won, after all," said I, disconcertedly; but he shook his head.

"I stopped short after I got the telegram and the money," he answered. "Uncle Richard, I find that I'm only a big boy still; but I'm not quite a fool. Your goodness in granting my hasty demand seemed somehow to open my eyes. I determined at least not to play any more last night."

"Good boy!" said I. "And—did you see Mademoiselle de la Croix?"

Dick gave an odd laugh, crimsoned, then paled, but continued bravely:

"I went over to the concert-room and listened to the orchestra for a while, then went out, and was walking up and down the ante-chamber, when I came face-to-face with Gabrielle and the Brazilian. She smiled coldly—just said a few chilling words—and I was wondering whether to turn away or to insult her cavalier, when, in answer to a quick whisper from her, I heard him say distinctly: 'An old friend? Oh, then, my angel, tell him what is to happen.'"

"Well?" I asked, as the boy paused with a queer sound in his throat.

"Well," he repeated, "without a blush or tremor, Gabrielle said in the sweetest voice,

"The Señor de Carifias wishes me to present him to Monsieur Godwin, whom he and I beg to be present at our marriage on Thursday of next week."

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

"Oh, I didn't give way, Uncle Richard—I took it like a man, though my ears buzzed, and the room went round and round. I congratulated them both—said I was sure they were worthy of each other, and moved on. Then I met the Countess, and she whispered in my ear: 'I liked you so much better than him; but it was a case of love at first sight with both of them. You must forgive my sweet Gabrielle—she tried to obey me and be as fond of you as I was.'"

"Stupendous woman!" I cried.

"I told her I was grateful," said Dick, "and bowed myself off just in time to catch the Nice train. But don't forget, Uncle Dick, that I stopped playing before I knew she had deserted me. I had already lost all my money. But years is safe, and I am no poorer except in the matter of faith in woman."

"And you leave the refinement of the home-circle to come to this gaming-hole to study women?" I asked, calmly.

"Don't, Uncle Dick," he answered, sadly. "I should be at home now, and happy with the sweetest girl in the world, only that she would not marry me without my mother's consent—refused because she was poor."

"A valuable possession," goeth I, "the love of a man who could come straight away from the sweetest girl in the world to fall a victim to a woman like Gabrielle de la Croix."

"I know—no girl could ever forgive me," he said: "I can't make anybody understand. I feel as if I had had a fever or been insane—it never was love. Well, I'm cured—though, maybe, too late. I'm going home. I'll earn my own living—at least, I can do that—dependance on my mother shan't make me grow utterly worthless."

I did not let the boy go at once—I took him away from Nice. During the lovely early summer days we were wandering about the Pyrenees; and, one morning, when we were at that most picturesque of mountain villages, St. Sauveur, Dick danced into my room, wildly waving a letter over his head.

"Think of mother's turning up such a trump!" he shouted. "She consents to my going into Stephen's office as an articled clerk, and has invited my—Miss Dorothy Ventnor—to pass the summer with her at Scarborough."

"And who may Miss Dorothy Ventnor be?" I asked, innocently.

"Oh, you know!" he cried. "She was the girl my mother objected to because she was a governess. I never for one moment ceased to love her! I was desperate between what I thought her coldness and the mother's hardness—rushed into the first insanity I could find—but it's all right now! I shall tell Dorothy the whole story—she's an angel of goodness—she will forgive me."

"Brain-fever patients are always forgiven their vagaries," said I.

Master Dick started for London that night, and went off to Scarborough by the first train.

I missed the boy a good deal, but was thankful to have him gone. My life drifted back into its old quiet routine. I believe that during several months only one noteworthy bit of news reached me; it was that Señor de Carifias had been wounded in a duel, and had returned to Brazil, leaving his wife to the care of her devoted mother, and doomed to live on the smallest pittance that ever limited the taste of an extravagant woman.

Just a year after that lovely June day in the Pyrenees, I was seated in my Paris apartment, when I received a letter from the boy Dick, now well on in his legal studies.

Antoine, the invaluable, brought the missive in along with my breakfast-tray, and I shall give the contents of the epistle, because, incoherently written as they are, they will fully explain my share in a high-handed and outrageous felony.

"Oh, you heavenly Uncle Richard! How

I should like to hug you for conceiving such a plot, and that blessed old Antoine for carrying it out so perfectly! But how you must have missed his services during all those months while he was enacting the part of thief!

"I ought to have known that outside of a novel no mother could lay aside theory and prejudice so quickly as mine did, but you are aware that I don't perceive even evident facts very readily. Not a word did old Mr. Stephens breathe to Dorothy or me until a short time ago; but, before I came back to England, he had told my mother that Dorothy would have a competency if she became my wife. Now I know that her fifty thousand pounds was a present from you, which I prize the more, because it was a gift to my darling instead of my graceless self."

"Well, the telegraph duly informed you that we were married last week. Mr. Stephens handed Dorothy your other wedding-gift—a cheque for the Monte Carlo money—which Antoine had deposited in his hands when he reached London, instead of being safe in South America, as the police and I supposed. That money—you know enough now of Dorothy to expect some such good deed from her—she has used it to found a hospital for orphan children."

"I believe this is all my news; for you know already that I am the happiest fellow alive, and your loving nephew Dick."

F. L. B.

FACETIE.

The paper-hanger makes money by going to the wall.

A DOCTOR always remembers kindly his first patient—if the patient lives.

A COUNTRY firm advertises for an "oak cashier's desk." An oak cashier is one who "leaves," of course.

"There was a negro baby born in Boston the other night that weighed only ten ounces." "H'm, h'm! Singular that anything so dark should be so light."

YOUNG BACHELOR: "I see Mrs. John Sherwood says Englishmen are the most indulgent husbands in the world." Married man: "Humph! We have to be."

A TOOTHFUL applicant for graduation on being asked the other day, "What does history teach?" answered, "That the United Kingdom never has been whipped and never will be."

MISS POUNDER (who has been having a wrestling match with the keyboard of the piano): "Have you a sensitive musical ear, Mr. Tympanum?" Mr. T. (more candid than polite): "Yes, I'm sorry to say I have."

A FOND mother called the other day upon the President of a training college, and asked anxiously if her son would be well taken care of at college. Said Dr. Patton: "Madam, we guarantee satisfaction, or return the boy."

"JOHNNIE, what is a noun?" "Name of a person, place, or thing." "Very good, Johnnie; give an example." "Hand-organ grinder." "And why is a 'hand-organ grinder' a noun?" "Because he's a person plays a thing."

FATHER: "Young Sampson has been devoted to you for two or three years, hasn't he?" Daughter: "Yes, papa." Father: "Isn't he very slow about proposing?" Daughter: "Yes, George is a little slow, but (confidently) I think he is sure."

A PHYSICIAN who lost his pet dog put a little notice in the paper, headed "Warning?" which charitably described the animal as having "strayed." "It is of no value, not even to the owner; but, having been experimented upon for scientific purposes with many virulent poisons, a lick from its tongue—and it is very affectionate—would probably be fatal." The dog came back the next day.

ADVICE TO THE STAGE-STROCK.—"How would I advise you to begin?" responded an old actor to an aspirant for stage glories. "Well, the best plan is to begin like a good dinner—with the soup."

"Will you please insert this obituary notice!" asked an old gentleman of an editor. "I make bold to ask it, because I know the deceased had a great many friends around here who'd be glad to hear of his death."

A SETTLER.—"I think an egg would make that coffee settle, Mrs. Scadgers," said the impetuous boarder headlessly. "If the recipe is a sure one; pray let me offer you an egg. Mr. Slooper," responded the landlady, severely, and then the conversation languished.

A PAIR OF FIBBERS.—Dadeley (who is not as big a fool as he looks): "Did you, ah, give my card to Mith Bendoligper?" Servant: "Yes, sir." Dudley: "What did she say?" Servant: "She told me to tell you, sir, that she was sorry that she was not in." Dadeley: "Ah, indeed! Please tell your mistress that I said I wath glad I didn't call."

A TEST OF LOVE.—Mr. Billington (earnestly): "Ah, Miss Laura, would that there were something I might do, however difficult, to show the ardent affection—" Miss Cooington: "There is, but I'm afraid you'll find it too hard." Mr. Billington: "Oh, name it; I will be only too happy—" Miss Cooington: "Well, just stop talking nonsense."

A NICE LEGAL QUESTION.—Bobby had wickedly eaten part of the preserves on the shelf, and his mother shut him in the closet. On letting him out she discovered that he had eaten the rest of the preserves. Mightily displeased, she asked him why he had done so. "Because, ma," Bobby replied, "I heard a tell one of his clients that a person couldn't be punished twice for the same offence."

HE STRUCK THE RIGHT HOUSE.—"Gen'l'm'n," said the belated citizen rather thickly to the two friends who were assisting him up the front-steps at 3 A.M. "I dunno whether this z'my house 'r not. Nanahy!" he called out loudly, "m'dear, are you (hic), are you there, m'dear?" "I am, sir!" answered a cold, metallic voice, on the inside, accompanied by a clinking sound like the rasping of a shovel on the stair-way; "I am waiting for you, you drunken beast!" "Gen'l'm'n," said the belated citizen, with dignified solemnity, "this is th' right house! Good mornin'!"

BRIGHT SCHOOLBOYS.—In teaching his boys the composition of sentences, a schoolmaster said to them: "If I ask you 'What have I in my hand?' you must not answer, 'Chalk,' but compose a full sentence, and say, 'You have chalk in your hand.' Now we will go on. What have I on my feet?" "Boots," was the immediate answer. "Wrong. You haven't listened to my directions." "Stockings," ventured another heedless one. "Wrong again; worse than ever!" wrathfully cried the teacher. "Well?" he continued interrogatively to a lad near him. "Please sir—" Then he paused. Perhaps he thought his answer might seem funny, but, convinced that it was right, he gasped out, recklessly, "Corns!"

CHEATING THE RAILWAY.—Scene: A railway station. Ticket-collector, in making his collection, finds an old gentleman fumbling in his pockets for his ticket. Ticket-collector: "Tickets, please!" Old gentleman: "I'm just looking for it." Ticket-collector: "Well, I'll be here again in a few minutes. See and have it ready then." Ticket collector returns shortly; but the old gentleman is still hunting for it. Ticket-collector (suddenly): "Why, you have it in your mouth, man!" Old gentleman (giving him the ticket): "Oh, so I have! Here you are!" Another gentleman in the carriage, as the train moves on, to first gentleman: "I'm afraid you're losing your memory, sir." Old gentleman: "No fear of that—no fear of that! The ticket was a fortnight old, and I was just soaking the date off it!" Tableau.

SOCIETY.

THE QUEEN is expected to return to Windsor about the 21st inst., and Her Majesty will go to Osborne shortly afterwards. When the Sovereign leaves the latter place, Balmoral will be, of course, the chosen ground, until the Court comes South again for the winter months. Early in the following spring, if all goes well, the Queen is to pay another visit to the Villa Palmieri.

THE loyal townfolk of Nottingham are busy just now searching their dictionaries for pretty words wherewithal to frame a petition begging Her Majesty to shed the light of her Imperial countenance in their midst on the occasion of the opening of the new Guildhall in July. The last visit of the Queen to Nottingham was when Her Majesty was on her way from Chatsworth to Belvoir Castle, just forty-nine years ago. The Nottingham people think it is about time they should have another sight of their Sovereign, and if Her Majesty accepts the invitation they promise to give her a right Royal reception.

THE Prince of Wales intends visiting Nottingham during the Royal Agricultural Society's Show in July. His Royal Highness will be the guest of the Duke of St. Albans at Bestwood Lodge.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales are to be present at the opening of the new Great North Central Hospital in the Holloway-road. The Princess, it is announced, will at the opening receive purses of not less than five guineas towards the building fund. Here is a nice chance for those ladies who may be anxious to come in close contact with Royalty.

THE Princess of Wales wore, at the Derby, a cloth dress of a red-brown shade, trimmed with otter, with bonnet to match; her three daughters wore black dresses made very short in the skirt, with light grey jackets and hats trimmed with red. Their cousin May was in grey—a silver-toned cloth with tailor-made jacket and hat of a deep cardinal, and looked simply lovely. Her mother was muffled up in a dust-coloured cloak most of the day, for jolly Mary owns to feeling not so young as she once was, and to being tried by the cold winds of our variable climate; but her dress, when seen, was of a dark colour with a grey brocade upper skirt, and an embroidered bonnet surmounted with moss roses. The Grand Duchess Paul of Mecklenburg-Schwerin was clad in striped velvet and satin of the shade called *sang de bœuf*, with bonnet to match. The whole party who occupied the Royal box looked gay and well amused, and the younger Princesses seemed keenly interested in the race, and quite excited when it was announced that Ayshire was the winner.

THE little cart in which Miss Nevill, daughter of Lady Curzon, takes her daily drives in the park, is very much admired. Miss Nevill is a capital whip, and handles her spirited chestnut admirably; in this she resembles her mother, for Lady Curzon can too! along a four-in-hand as well, or better, than most of her male friends. These little equipages for ladies' driving are quite the rage this season, and may be seen in numbers in the Park, all with the smartest of steeds and neatest of trappings, and a dainty liveried tiger perched up in his place to enhance the effect. In the case of Miss Nevill's trap, the chocolate-coloured Curzon livery looks particularly well as a finish to the dandy turn-out.

THERE was an immense gathering in St. James's park to witness the trooping of the colours in honour of the Queen's birthday, and though many of those who had been invited to the reserved positions did not put in an appearance—owing to the simple fact that they overleapt themselves—there were quite enough arrivals between the hours of nine and ten to make the advent of summer a very perishing advent for those who were fully exposed to the glare of the sun.

STATISTICS.

FRESH MEAT IMPORTS.—During April we received 80,499cwt. of beef, against 48,478cwt. for the same month of last year, 78,341cwt. being sent from the Atlantic ports and the United States alone, against 46,953cwt. The imports of mutton for the month were, 75,391cwt. against 89,963cwt., New Zealand contributing, 41,788cwt. against 51,338cwt. and the Argentine Republic 26,682cwt., against 18,639cwt., while nothing was received from the Falkland Islands, although in the corresponding month of last year we imported 16,481cwt. from that quarter. The quantity of pork imported during the month was 16,781cwt. as compared with 12,621cwt.

HOP-PICKERS.—In the annual report of the Society for the Conveyance and Improved Lodging of Hop-Pickers, recently issued, is the following: "The acreage, under hop return to the Agricultural Department of the Privy Council, showed a decrease in 1886 of 1,201 acres. The low price of hops which has of late years generally prevailed, has made itself severely felt throughout the hop districts, and a decrease of 6,400 acres, of which nearly 4,000 are in the county of Kent, is recorded in the returns for the current year to the department. The total acreage under hops last year was 70,127 and this year 63,706. The returns of the special hop-pickers traffic by rail show that upwards of 14,500 persons were conveyed at special fares to, and nearly 18,000 from, the hop districts during the season of 1887.

GEMS.

WISDOM consists not in knowing many things, nor even in knowing them thoroughly, but in choosing and following that which conduces the most surely to our lasting happiness and glory.

LIFE without industry is guilt, and industry without art is brutality; and for the words "good" and "wicked" used by men, you may almost substitute the word "makers" or "destroyers."

CENSURE and criticism never hurt anybody. If false, they cannot harm you, unless you are wanting in character; and if true, they show a man his weak points, and forewarn him against failure and trouble.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SPONGE CAKE.—Take the weight of three eggs (in the shell) of finely powdered loaf sugar and half that quantity of potato flour, put the sugar and the yolks of the eggs in a basin, and beat them well together with an egg whisk, or with a fork, until the mixture assumes a white creamy appearance; add essence of lemon to taste, sprinkle in (beating the mixture all the time) half the potato flour, and add the whites of four eggs whisked to a stiff froth; then put in, in the same manner, the rest of the flour, and lastly, add the remaining four whites beaten to a froth. As soon as the composition is smoothly mixed together—this must be done quickly—pour it into a buttered plain mould, and bake it in a slow oven; when quite done turn the cake out of the mould, and leave it to get cold. In the meantime put the whites of two eggs into a basin, with the juice of half a lemon and some glace sugar, stir the mixture briskly with a wooden spoon, adding more glace sugar as it gets thin, until it becomes a smooth white paste of the consistency of butter; lay the mixture all over the cake with a knife, and lay it on as smoothly as possible; put the cake in the oven just long enough for the icing to set; take it out, and before the icing has time to cool, ornament the cake with preserved cherries, small-coloured sugar plums, &c., in any pattern liked.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Boulanger Floral Emblem is a red carnation. Following his Imperial model, "Boulanger le Petit," as some of his enemies call him, duly appears with a flower in his buttonhole, which his adherents dutifully adopt. By the way, Berlin barbers facetiously ask their customers whether they will have their beards trimmed "à la Boulanger."

AN interesting collection of commercial products, made by Dr. Forbes Watson, has been acquired by University College, Dundee. It contains some 7,500 samples, embracing between 700 and 800 fibres, over 500 dyes and dyestuffs, 500 oils and oil-seeds, 600 or 700 gums, resins, and guttas, nearly 2,000 medicinal substances, and more than as many samples of foodstuffs.

A NOVEL INNOVATION.—At a recent dinner, a somewhat novel innovation was introduced. After the soup was served, before the next course came on, the host gave the signal and rose from his seat, the ladies remained stationary; each gentleman then moved to the next gentleman's seat, to the right. This was done at every course, the courses being so arranged that each gentleman had been the whole round of the table, and at the end was seated by her whom he had taken in to dinner.

A BEAR'S CURIOSITY.—Greenlanders have an ingenious way of escaping from the fury of polar bears if they can only spare some article of wearing apparel to amuse them or arouse their curiosity. A glove, they say, is sufficient for this purpose, for a bear will not stir further till he has turned every finger of it inside out; and, as these animals are not very dextrous with their clumsy paws, that takes up enough time to allow the men to escape. Still, it must be rather exciting to have one's life depend upon his skill in throwing down the gauntlet.

BARBARIC HATRED.—For nearly a century Hayti has been a black independent State. The negro race have had it to themselves and have not been interfered with. They were equipped, when they started on their career of freedom, with the Catholic religion, a civilised language, European laws and manners, and the knowledge of various arts and occupations which they had learned while they were slaves. They speak French still; they are nominally Catholic still, and the rage and rage of the gold-lace of French civilisation continue to cling about their institutions. But in the heart of them has revived the old idolatry of the Gold Coast, and in the villages of the interior, where they are out of sight and can follow their instincts, they sacrifice children in the serpent's honour after the manner of their forefathers. Perhaps nothing better could be expected from a liberty which was inaugurated by assassination and plunder. Political changes which prove successful do not begin in that way.

MODERN ROME.—Portions of Old Rome are now disappearing, notably the Ghetto, or Jewish quarter, and New Rome is increasing so fast that its great uprising buildings look not unlike those of London, were it not for that poetry of colour—pink, yellow, terra cotta, and pale blue—in which the Italians so much delight. Great changes are going on over the Eternal City—excavations in the Forum, and elsewhere, are being liberally pushed, and sanitary measures enforced. Whole streets of fine buildings are replacing ruins and debris, and, as if its three hundred and sixty churches were not enough, St. John Lateran, where all the popes are crowned, has been enlarged to a surprising extent, while St. Paul beyond the walls, which to our mind is quite as splendid as St. Peter's, has now a complete façade. Growth and enterprise are marks of our time even in Old Rome, stimulated, no doubt, by the constant stream of tourists, but encouraged also by the wise policy of King Umberto, who loves his people and is idolized by them.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MAGGIE.—At any good chemist's.

M. J. W.—No. Too unformed to judge.

G. S.—November 30, 1868, came on Monday.

M. B.—Do not use irons, and try a curling fluid instead.

E. P.—1. Moderate. 2. Use either Fuller's earth or ox gall.

P. F.—Try powdered French chalk with blotting paper and iron with a warm iron. Fair.

IRIS.—1. The 10th June, 1865, fell on a Saturday. 2. Precise and straightforward with tolerably even temper.

LILIAN AND VIOLET.—The disparity unless under very exceptional circumstances is far too great.

ADA PARSONS.—See answers in recent numbers. We have constantly given advice on the subject.

LANKEY JOHN.—1. No. 2. Try tincture of cantharides and sweet oil; any chemist will give you the proportions.

E. G. G.—Plumbers are attached to false teeth, and can only be used in that way. Consult an experienced dentist on the subject.

LEAH.—1. Salt will generally do it. 2 and 3. Consult a respectable medical man. Plenty of open-air exercise and moderate, but good living.

JENNY.—The vast number of islands lying south of the equator in the South Pacific Ocean are designated by the general title of the South Sea Islands.

A. D. K.—1. It all depends on the terms on which he held it, and whether the club was registered under the Friendly Societies Act. 2. Too unformed to judge.

E. S.—Do not allow any one to speak disrespectfully of your affianced. Ascertain the truth of the reports, and then confront her accusers with evidences of the falsity of their statements.

G. L.—Restrain your ardour until you are better acquainted with the young lady. Possibly a better acquaintance may cure you of your passion. At any rate, it is idle to nourish it until it is possible for you to marry.

E. C. C.—The ostrich was formerly called the camel-turd on account of its resemblance, in some respects, to the camel. The foot of the ostrich resembles that of a camel, and the former's powers of digestion assimilate it to the ruminating animal.

A. D. H.—Garlic used in moderation is thought to be beneficial in many ways. Its effects on the system are those of a general stimulant. It quickens the circulation, and acts upon the stomach as a tonic and carminative. By many it is habitually used as a condiment to aid digestion. If taken in excess it is apt to produce headache and fever.

W. P. T.—The Martini-Henry rifle was adopted as the service rifle for the whole British Army in 1871. The manufacture of this arm commenced shortly afterwards; the first issue was made in 1875, and in less than two years from that date every regular soldier was supplied with it. A few years later it was issued to the militia and the volunteers.

B. N.—Funchal, the capital of the Island of Madeira, is resorted to by invalids from all countries on account of the temperature of its climate, which is about 68 degrees Fah. The difference between the hottest and coldest months (August and February) average only ten degrees. The trade is chiefly in the hands of the English residents. Fish, fruit, and vegetables are cheap and abundant, but fresh meat and poultry command high prices.

J. J. M.—An embargo is an order from the government, usually issued in time of war or threatening hostilities prohibiting the departure of ships or goods from some or all the ports of the country. The order may be enforced on either native or foreign ships or merchandise, and when it is found necessary to stop the communication of intelligence between any two places, an embargo is laid upon all ships, both foreign and those under the national flag.

R. S. W.—1. Orange County, Florida, U.S., is near the middle of the peninsula. Its area is estimated at 2,500 square miles. The surface is level, and is occupied by numerous lakes and swamps and extensive forests of pine and other trees. 2. Most of the soil is sandy, but it produces pasture for cattle, and the orange, lemon, and sugar cane flourish there. 3. The capital of Orange County is Orlando, which has a court-house, a church, a hotel, a money-order post office, and saw and grist mills.

LORDISKA.—A gentleman walking with a lady may take either side of the pavement. It is not necessary to change sides as often as the street is crossed, that the lady may always have the inner side, as this is often awkward and inconvenient. If the thoroughfare is a crowded one, the gentleman must keep the lady on that side of him where she will be the least exposed to crowding and danger. In walking, as in driving, keep to the left if possible. Of course, much depends upon circumstances. In the evening, or whenever or wherever the safety, comfort or convenience of the lady seems to dictate it, her escort should offer his arm. At other times it is not customary to do so, unless the parties be husband and wife, or engaged. Even then they are liable to be laughed at by trifling passers-by, who consider that such evidence of affection should be reserved for private exhibition.

R. L. N.—Sardonyx is a beautiful and valuable kind of onyx, marked with layers of white and a rich orange brown.

F. R.—The historical Arthur, about whom tradition has woven such a web of romance, is believed to have lived some time in the sixth century, but owing to the absence of authentic documents it is now impossible to reconstruct his history.

F. R. B.—Castor oil and brandy will help the hair, if anything will. The proportions are three ounces of oil and one ounce of brandy. Rub well into the roots of the hair about twice a week. This preparation not only promotes the growth of the hair, but darkens it and also gives it a fine gloss.

W. F.—You had better refer the rich and handsome stranger to your father. He will do what is best for your happiness. You should not have permitted him to address you in the street or to escort you home. His familiarity gives us a very unfavourable opinion of him. The hair enclosed is blonde.

A. N. S.—It is impossible to fix an exact date for the beginning of the institution of knighthood. The Roman equites, although called knights, did not correspond to the knights of the middle ages. Medieval knighthood probably took its origin in France a little before the Norman invasion, and sprang into its full development during the Crusades.

JANEY.—The young man undoubtedly wished to show his affection for you, and was too bashful to avow it. You should draw him out by exercising a little tact. He did not mean to offend you; on the contrary, he was probably impelled by his love for you. Your father can assist you by evening the young man's intentions, and if he is able to marry and support you.

MY LITTLE ONES.

To you they seem but children fair,
Perhaps a trouble and a care;
But ah! my little ones, you see,
My friend, are all the world to me!

Their earnest questions, grave and queer,
With marked indifference you hear;
While I these childish queries find
But blossoms of the human mind.

When I unsullied truth would learn,
My friend, I question them in turn,
And treasure up the answers wise,
Prompted, it seems, from yonder skies.

My little ones, so bright and free,
May God in kindness spare to me,
That I by these sweet treasures given,
May learn the surest road to Heaven.

That I may look on each young face,
And thereby daily, hourly, trace
An index to the spirit free,
My God would ever have in me.

M. A. K.

DAISY.—Antonius Stradivarius stands confessed as the greatest of all the violin makers. His workmanship, we are told, was absolute perfection, and his varnish soft, rich, brilliant, and generally a dark auburn colour, but sometimes red or reddish brown. The wood that he used was selected with the utmost care, both for vibratory power and beauty of grain.

TIBBY.—It is very unusual for a bride wearing white to appear with black gloves and no gloves. If the wedding should take place in the evening the groom and groomsmen will be in evening dress, and may wear gloves or not as they choose; the weight of authority, however, is against gloves; if the wedding is in the daytime, of course they will wear ordinary morning dress, and no gloves.

G. G. H.—In 1557 the famous Geneva Bible appeared. It was so-called because the translation was executed in Geneva by several English divines. It is, however, best known as the "Breeches Bible," on account of the rendering of the 7th verse of the 3rd chapter of Genesis, where it is recorded that "they made themselves breeches," instead of "aprons," as given in the King James' version.

A. H.—The Isthmus of Panama, called formerly the Isthmus of Darien, was at one time divided into the provinces of Asuero, Chiquiri, Panama, and Veragua, but in 1865 the several provinces were formed into the State of Panama, of which each now constitutes a department. Hence the change of name. The colony of Darien was founded on the Isthmus, near the close of the seventeenth century, by William Paterson, a Scotchman, and the founder of the Bank of England. The place selected was Acta, now Fort Escobedo, about thirty miles north-west of the Gulf of Darien. The settlement was subsequently abandoned.

LAURA.—Oil marks, and marks where people have rested their heads, can be taken from wall-paper by mixing pipe-clay with water to the consistency of cream, laying it on the spot, and letting it remain until the following day, when it may be easily removed with a pen-knife or brush. Dust may be removed with bellow. Dry bread, at least two days old, is also used in brightening wall-paper. When this latter is used, it is necessary to commence at the top of the room and wipe the bread gently downward about half a yard at each stroke, till the upper part of the paper is completely cleaned all round. Then begin on the lower portion and go over it in the same manner, taking care to rub the paper gently, and never across the grain.

E. G.—Send your friends some silver article on the occasion of their wedding anniversary, the price of which must be gauged by your financial condition.

F. F.—If you are good and kind to your wife, you will be able to win her away from her passion for another. Do not attempt to extort money from the man who has attracted her. It may be that you are entirely mistaken. The children are the strongest magnet for a mother's heart.

S. W.—The lotus is a genus of leguminous plants, the name of which was applied to an Egyptian plant (the water-lily of the Nile). The lotus found in Northern Africa, the fruit of which is mildly sweet, was fabled by the ancients to make strangers who ate of it forget their native country, or lose all desire to return to it.

G. S.—Vienna, in Austria, furnishes the best opportunities for study. Berlin, in Prussia, comes next. The examinations in some of the smaller universities are considered more severe than those of Vienna, so that although having fewer students and slighter advantages for the study of disease, their degrees rank higher.

A. B.—The existence of pimples on the face or any other portion of the body indicates a torpid state of the skin, and its consequent inability to perform its natural functions. This irregularity in the interior mechanism causes the pores of the skin to become obstructed, the insensible perspiration accumulates daily, irritation ensues, and pimples appear.

M. M.—The following is a simple way of making charlotte roses: Split and trim one pound of lady's fingers and fit neatly in the bottom and sides of two quart moulds. Whip one quart of rich, sweet cream (previously sweetened with three-fourths of a cup of sugar and flavoured with two teaspoonfuls of vanilla or other extract) to a stiff froth. Then fill the moulds, lay the cakes close together on the top, and set in a cool place until needed.

C. H. V.—Silver should be washed after each meal at which it is used in very hot water with hard soap. Wipe hard and quickly on a clean towel, and then polish with a dry flannel rag. If discoloured with mustard, egg, or by any other means, rub out the stain with a stiff tooth brush kept for the purpose and silver soap. Copper kitchen utensils should be cleaned with brickdust and flannel, while sifted wood ashes or whitening will keep tinware in a bright condition.

E. N. P.—If there was any engagement at all with the first young man, whom you love to distraction, he has himself broken it off. You need not, therefore, feel any scruples on that point, if you are at all inclined to try and love the other gentleman. From the tenour of your letter one is inclined to think you are a fickle young lady, and that if you really love to distraction, as claimed, it does not take you long to get over it. Perhaps gentleman No. 1 recognised this fact when he ceased to visit you.

D. C. F.—Brussels carpets are made of linen and worsted, but only the worsted shows on the upper side. The under part looks like a coarse linen cloth. The worsted yarns are woven like velvet over wires which are laid across the warp from one side to the other. These wires are afterwards drawn out, leaving the worsted yarns standing in a row of loops across the carpet. The surface of all Brussels carpets is made up of these rows of little loops, of which there are sometimes more than three hundred in a yard.

S. D. Y.—You must bide your time, watch your opportunities, and take any situation as teacher that may come in your way. Sometimes a teacher is wanted for a few weeks to take the place of someone who is ill or unavoidably absent. If such a chance occurs for you, seize upon it, and do your very best. Or if any temporary or poorly remunerated situation is offered, take it, and show what you can do. In the meantime, while waiting for an opportunity, do not spend your leisure in moping or repining, but study hard to accomplish yourself more and more in all the arts of teaching.

D. C. B.—The first thing for you to do would be to have a frank and affectionate talk with the young lady on the subject. It may be that the young man—her brother's intimate friend—is wholly innocent of the charges made against him on mere rumour. It would be worth your while to ascertain, if possible, what are the actual facts of the case before condemning your betrothed for treating her brother's friend cordially, simply because you had heard ill-natured things said of him, and wanted her to mortify him by behaving coolly towards him. If you really love her, and if she also loves you, it would be foolish for you to break the engagement as the case now stands.

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